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BETTIE PORTER BOARDWALK COMMITTEE

LOUISE R. BAKER

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Baker







BETTIE WAS DRAWING ON HER DRIVING GLOVES WHEN THE DOCTOR'S BOY BROUGHT HER A NOTE.

BETTIE PORTER BOARDWALK COMMITTEE

By

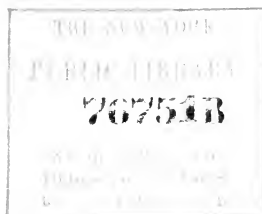
LOUISE R. BAKER

Author of "Mrs. Pinner's Little Girl," etc



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Bettie Porter, Boardwalk Committee

CHAPTER I

A SUDDEN IDEA

IN the winter time Primrose Hollow was not an attractive place. To begin with, when the sun was shining warmly the roads were muddy generally and particularly. There were two hills in Primrose, one opposite the other, and, of course, there was a hollow. The hollow road was generally particularly muddy and it terminated in front of the post-office after growing broad and emphatic before the door of a merchandise store where articles were sold or said to be sold for "cash only." The roof of the post-office and the roof of the store joined, though the one was lower and newer than the other; in fact the business of receiving and distributing the mails was performed in the annex of the cash store.

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Prominent among the manufactured features of the hollow was the recently erected station, brilliant in its coat of paint. Across from the station stood the Fairbank scales. Behind the scales, in quite an out-of-the-way and appropriate place was a short horse-rack, while between the scales and the cash store was as long a horse-rack as the majority of the Primrose people had ever seen. Rising darkly into the air was the old warehouse, which together with the dwelling houses in the hollow will of necessity be hereafter definitely described.

The houses in Primrose, although limited in number, presented numerous classes of home architecture and home carpentry, and more than one of them was a creditable specimen of the workman's skill. On the top of the highest of the Primrose hills was a long, lean house, evidently fashioned far back in the nineteenth century, yet incongruously built of weatherboarding instead of logs or plaster. It may be that the Widow Porter's home was not as ancient as it seemed. This house had been painted on the front and washed on the sides and back, and both the paint and the wash were the worse for

wear. There were innumerable knot-holes in the weather-boarding. In the summer time Mrs. Porter's home was very respectable, for the grass grew green on the lawn, the birds enjoyed their nests in the tall locust trees and in the knot-holes of the weather-boarding, and the roses twined luxuriantly about the pillars of the porch. In the summer time Mrs. Porter was annoyed by repeated requests to take boarders and in the fall and winter she was annoyed by painters insisting on a job.

Across the road from the long, lean house there was an undeniably modern house. It was built of red brick, possessed a bay window, inside shutters of oak and a slate roof. A windmill showed its gorgeous fan above the slate roof and off to itself in the yard a United States flag waved on its high staff. In the centre of the circle before the house was a large plaster fountain which seldom played. The road about the circle was heavily graveled and there were no trees. The summer visitors who worried Mrs. Porter kept rigorously away from the home of Stephen Caulk.

Mr. Stephen Caulk was indisputably, flaunt-

ingly rich. He ran half a dozen sawmills, bought up grain, straw and hay, sold implements and fertilizers, held mortgages on two-thirds of the farms in his neighborhood, possessed large interests in distant coal fields and owned the one row of houses in Primrose Hollow, "together," according to Primrose gossip, "with furniture and tenants." Mr. Caulk tried his best to rule Primrose Hollow absolutely, resolutely and fervently. Against this particular characteristic of its richest inhabitant Primrose Hollow at times threatened to rise into resolute and absolute rebellion.

On the Primrose hill that was not as high as its neighbor stood a green fashionable-looking house, its south windows appearing to stare rigidly at such beautiful things as the painted new station and the unpainted old station, the scales, the horse-racks and that row of houses owned, together with furniture and tenants, by Mr. Stephen Caulk. A sign displayed upon the front gate belonging to the fashionable-looking house read thus :

DOCTOR HARLEY

A lawyer dwelt in Primrose Hollow, though

he practiced in the county town of Wainsborough. This learned gentleman's house was in color a pale yellow, in shape square and in size forty by forty feet. Considerable doubt existed in Primrose regarding the quality of the lawyer's door-plate. It was singularly conspicuous but was it, or wasn't it, silver? Time would tell but never the lawyer. He had a broad way of answering personal questions that left the questioner staggering in the darkness. The roof of the yellow house covered another extravagance. Mr. Stephen Caulk's wind-mill furnished the rich man's kitchen with water, the lawyer's unostentatious ram sent a water supply also to a bath-room. Certainly Lawrence Tarr was a man of airs as well as letters and it is small wonder that some people rejoiced in the fact that he was a comparative stranger in Primrose.

At the corner of the little town formed by the intersection of the hollow and the hill roads—the other corner being ruined or improved by the railroad—was a dressmaker's establishment. Miss Annie Taylor, Modiste, had pretty much her own way respecting the Sunday gowns of Primrose and its neighborhood. The dressmaker was

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in prosperous circumstances and she was keen and cool, a wonderful woman with few enemies.

The hollow road was short. Its one end, as has already been stated, terminated in front of the post-office. Facing it at the other end and thereby necessarily facing the road that ran over the hills was another store, its bow window displaying such a line of goods and prices as defied competition and now and then worried and disconcerted the soul of the man who proclaimed that he sold wares for "cash only."

Furthermore, in the very centre of the hollow of Primrose Hollow, leaning in a friendly manner against the dark old warehouse and opposite Mr. Stephen Caulk's row of houses was a small whitewashed provision store of which ugly reports were current.

Now besides the widow's house and the house of the rich man on the one hill, the lawyer's and the doctor's houses on the other hill, besides the dressmaker's establishment and the stores and the warehouse and the station and the row of houses owned by Mr. Stephen Caulk, besides the old station and the Fairbank scales, besides the horse-racks and a blacksmith's shop and a sad-

dlar's shop there were about a half dozen unpretentious dwellings scattered about Primrose, and let it be said, sorrowfully, that in the winter time Primrose Hollow, notwithstanding the brightness of its paint and its gleaming white-wash and the beauty of its name had an exceedingly mournful appearance.

Early one morning in December, a girl walked down the yard of the long, lean house, opened the painted gate and stepped out into the road. She was a tall girl, with fair hair, pink cheeks and dimples. She wore a cloth cape that reached barely to her waist and a tight little cap. Bettie Porter lifted her skirts, picked her way across the road and continued to pick her way down the road, the letter in her hand bearing evidence that she was going to the post-office. Notwithstanding her care, the girl lost her overshoes quite a number of times, both on the hill and in the hollow, and more than once a pleasantry was hurled at her from a passing teamster. The girl replaced her overshoes with patient endurance and threw back the pleasantries right graciously, but she gave vent to a sigh of relief when she reached the porch of the post-office.

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“Muddy!” she exclaimed, wiping her feet on the husk mat, “oh, no, just a little moist! We must wait till spring for the mud.”

An official air pervaded Uncle Sam’s department located in the annex of the cash store, clinging about the letter boxes and the rude little shelf where patrons wrote postal cards and filled out applications for money orders. The very act of filling a public office made the girl at that little inside window seem different from the other girls of Primrose. Katharine Dobson was separated from her kind during many hours of the day by that row of boxes and a wire partition. She was a granddaughter to the aged postmaster, and served her country in the capacity of clerk to her grandsire. Some dissenting voices declared the girl to be general mail manager as well as clerk, but this was a libel and numerous and difficult were the postal problems that the aged postmaster was called upon to unravel.

“Well, Bettie Porter, how-do-you-do?” cried the clerk, a ring of laughter accompanying the words, “I’ve been wondering and wondering what had become of you. John Dines said you weren’t sick.”

"Sick of the mud," said Bettie, staring down in disgust at her skirts. "Katharine Dobson, come out of your cage and look at me."

The post-office clerk obeyed, still laughing.

"John Dines is too true a member of the family to expose the fact that my rubber boots are gone beyond redemption," continued Bettie, sadly. "I fear, I greatly fear that I'll have to relinquish my job of mail bearer during the rest of the muddy season."

"Oh, don't," implored Katharine; "I'd die."

"Give me my letters," demanded the widow's daughter.

"I can't," returned the clerk; "they haven't come yet."

"Yesterday John Dines brought mother a paper," said Bettie, "and the day before a postal card for me."

"And the day before a memorandum book, if you please," said the clerk. "Don't accuse me, Miss Porter, of purloining the memorandum book. If you didn't receive it John Dines is the thief."

"Yes, indeed," declared Katharine, in answer to her friend's deepening dimples and shining

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eyes, "it has been said that I have wilfully and maliciously destroyed three valuable memorandum books. Did John drop yours in the mud?"

"No," said Bettie, "I got it. You noticed, I suppose, that our faithful negro carried my old book-bag? The memorandum book was brought to the house in good condition. John Dines told me the roads were terrible, and for once he spoke the truth. I lost my overshoes seven times."

"Only seven times?" exclaimed Miss Dobson. "You should have seen the milk men. They were spattered with mud, from their heads to their heels. In some places, they say, the wagon wheels sank to the hubs, and the horses—oh, the poor horses!—you met Mr. Jones' team. Didn't you pity the horses?"

"I don't believe I did. I was too deep in pity for myself." Again the widow's daughter mournfully surveyed her skirts, after which her gaze journeyed to her feet. The line between the morocco shoe and the rubber shoe was lost. She raised her skirt; there was mud upon her stockings. "Gracious!" she exclaimed, "I wish I had to do with the making of the roads."

Again the clerk laughed. She was a pretty

girl, especially when she laughed. Her head was covered with short brown curls, her eyes were black. The short curls, the result of an illness, made her look younger than she really was. There were people in and about Primrose who refused to believe that Katharine Dobson was "going on eighteen." They were of the opinion that she was too young, decidedly too young, for the responsible position which entailed the handling of the Primrose mail, "too young and too flighty."

The flighty creature flew back into her cage precipitously as the latch of the post-office door was lifted. She was grave and dignified enough as she handed Stephen Caulk his letters.

Bettie Porter watched the door close behind the richest man in Primrose, then she seated herself on the post-office bench. "If I had the management of the roads," she said, "the very first thing I would do would be to lay a boardwalk in Primrose Hollow."

"Oh!" cried the astonished clerk. If she had given her consideration to the subject of Bettie Porter presiding over the county roads she might have thought of pikes and bridges and gutters in

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the right places, but she never would have dreamed of a boardwalk for Primrose Hollow.

"Primrose Hollow ought to have a boardwalk," declared Miss Porter in a positive way. "How many inhabitants are there?"

This question was answered promptly. "Fifty adults, forty children and thirty-six dogs."

The widow's daughter was in no mood for fun. "Katharine," she asked, "why can't we have a boardwalk?"

"Why couldn't we have the Union Church?" asked Katharine in turn. "Why couldn't we have a schoolhouse, Bettie Porter?"

"Because Mr. Stephen Caulk interfered and spoiled everything," said Bettie.

"We can't have a boardwalk," asserted Katharine, "because the Primrose people have never yet been of one mind, because more than one or two of our prominent citizens are rankly opposed to any sort of improvement, because the people who failed to erect a Union Church and a schoolhouse are not going to succeed in building a boardwalk; because, Miss Bettie Porter, you and I are penniless."

"Where there's a will, there's a way," said

Bettie Porter. "A brilliant thought has occurred to me."

"What?" asked the clerk.

"Why shouldn't the girls of Primrose form themselves into a Boardwalk Committee and work for a boardwalk? I am certain I'm willing to work."

"So am I," said Katharine. Then the clerk added, despairingly, "Mr. Stephen Caulk will want to manage the committee."

The widow's daughter rose and declared herself. "From the very beginning," she said, "the Boardwalk Committee of Primrose Hollow must determine to have nothing whatever to do with Mr. Stephen Caulk."

CHAPTER II

THE NOTICE

"ELIZABETH TARR can typewrite the notices," said the post-office clerk, bringing her hands together enthusiastically. The flighty young woman was again outside her cage. "She owns a typewriter, you know. Some people are of the opinion that she's preparing to go into her father's law office. Elizabeth herself has never said so, but then Elizabeth never does say anything."

"Yes, she can typewrite the notices," said Bettie, in a tone of infinite satisfaction.

"Mary Harley and Sue Rider are the only other girls in Primrose," said Katharine, thoughtfully. "Will five of us be enough?"

"Plenty," answered the widow's daughter. "I'll enlighten the three who are yet in the dark concerning our tremendous undertaking. We'll call a meeting for to-night here in the post-office, after office hours, of course."

"Of course," echoed Miss Dobson, who, let

people talk as they might, had never neglected her duty to Uncle Sam.

"Elizabeth Tarr can work on the notices to-day; we must have them posted to-morrow." Bettie Porter rose from the post-office bench and pulled her little cape about her shoulders.

"Where will we post the notices?" asked Katharine, loth to see her visitor depart even on such an important errand.

The widow's daughter answered promptly: "Everywhere, here and in the stores and the shops and in the station."

A second time the post-office clerk brought her hands together enthusiastically. The door of the office opened and closed and Katharine walked to the window and looked out. Bettie Porter started rapidly on her way, a graceful girlish figure with her head held high; but at the corner of the station she stopped, stooped and tugged at her right overshoe.

"Once!" said Katharine.

Bettie turned, facing the Fairbank scales and began diligently picking her way across the road. Before she had accomplished this feat, however, the elated watcher exclaimed, "Four times!"

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adding tranquilly, "If Primrose Hollow is to have a boardwalk Bettie Porter is decidedly the kind of person to work for it."

That evening, directly after eight o'clock, the five girls belonging to the Hollow held a meeting in the post-office, Elizabeth Tarr dutifully bringing with her a dozen neatly typewritten notices.

"I dictated them," explained Bettie, speaking of the notices. "You see, we haven't any time to lose. Elizabeth, please let them hear how it reads."

"A Boardwalk for Primrose Hollow," began Elizabeth. "That's the heading."

"Of course," said Sue Rider. "Suppose you give us the rest."

"I hope it's horribly emphatic," said Mary Harley. "The Primrose people never heed anything unless it's horribly emphatic."

"Go on with the reading, Elizabeth," said the clerk, impatiently.

Accordingly Elizabeth went on :

"Primrose Hollow needs a boardwalk ; in fact has needed it for years. A boardwalk will increase the value of property, will add comfort and zest to life, will save shoe leather, will bene-

fit both citizens and strangers. We, the Boardwalk Committee of Primrose Hollow, do, therefore, petition aid from the following: Every man, woman or child who ever passes along the roads of Primrose Hollow; every individual who has ever lost an overshoe in the mud of Primrose Hollow; every horseman who has ever jumped from his horse into a mudhole in Primrose Hollow; every farmer who has ever assisted in cutting up the roads and spoiling the undefined sidewalks of Primrose Hollow. Contributions will be gratefully received at the post-office.

MARY HARLEY,
SUSAN RIDER,
KATHARINE DOBSON,
ELIZABETH TARR,
BETTIE PORTER,

Boardwalk Committee.

The oldest daughter of William Rider, merchant, remarked gravely, "I am glad it says that the boardwalk will improve property."

"And that it will save shoe leather," said the post-office clerk.

"I am glad that everybody is petitioned to contribute," said Mary Harley.

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"Now," said Katharine, cheerfully, "we have got to choose a president."

Elizabeth Tarr looked surprised. "Why, aren't *you* the president?" she inquired, turning to Bettie.

"She is and she isn't," said the clerk, while the red suffused itself over Bettie's fair face. "She hasn't been elected."

"Will we have to vote?" asked Sue.

"We ought to if we're to do the thing correctly," answered the clerk. "Girls, let's do everything correctly."

"Very well," said Elizabeth Tarr.

The correct manner of electing a president for the Boardwalk Committee did not occupy many minutes and it is very likely that the widow's daughter felt highly gratified at the honor conferred upon her even though perfectly aware of the fact that no other member of the committee could fill the position.

"Tell them what you said this morning about Mr. Caulk, Bettie," said Katharine.

"Mr. Caulk!"

Elizabeth Tarr, Mary Harley and Susan Rider

uttered the name together in a breathless kind of way.

"You said this morning, Bettie, you know you did," continued Katharine, "that the Boardwalk Committee of Primrose Hollow must determine to have nothing whatever to do with Mr. Stephen Caulk."

"Make it a motion, president," cried Sue Rider, "and I will second it."

"We all will second it," declared Mary Harley.

"I make it a motion," said Bettie, and the other four members of the committee hastily seconded it.

"For certainly," said Sue Rider, "we none of us want that old man's finger in the pie."

The next morning the typewritten notices appeared in the stores and the shops, in the post-office and the station. They were a pleasurable surprise owing to the originality of the composition and they met with high appreciation.

The people of Primrose had become accustomed to a girl clerk in the post-office, but there was still a prevailing idea that girls were intended for housework and sewing, for marrying and set-

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ting down. It was exciting, to say the least, to think of five girls planning to build a boardwalk. The notice was roared over in the saddler's shop ; it met with criticism, adverse and favorable in the blacksmith's shop ; everywhere it was commented on and joked about and it was considered by more than one worthy individual to be full of wit, pluck and energetic audacity.

"Primrose Hollow needs a boardwalk ; in fact has needed it for years." Dave Palmer, an old farmer who had brought his milk cans to the station, stood in the gentleman's waiting room with his eyes upon the notice, reading slowly and emphatically. He laughed when he finished the first paragraph and the other men in the waiting room joined in the laugh.

"Read her off, Dave, from top to finish," ordered one of the listeners.

"Give us the whole economical situation," said another.

A third asked : "Say, Dave, is this here romance or reason ?" while a fourth groaned out, dismally, "It's some'n harder'n either ; it's United States history from start to finish. Go ahead, Dave, and give us the rest."

“We, the Boardwalk Committee of Primrose Hollow, do, therefore, petition aid from the following: Every man, woman or child who ever passes along the roads of Primrose Hollow.”

“Who does that there line take in?” asked the old man, turning about, his eyes dancing. “Say, boys? That there line in my opinion takes in about all the folks in this here neighborhood. What?”

The boys laughed.

“Every individual who has ever lost an overshoe in the mud of Primrose Hollow; every horseman who has ever jumped from his horse into a mud-hole in Primrose Hollow.”

“Who’s caught that time?” chuckled Mr. Palmer.

“Every farmer who has ever assisted in cutting up the roads and spoiling the undefined sidewalks of Primrose Hollow.”

“Good, good, good!” cried the reader, with a stamp of his foot and a wave of his hand. “‘Undefined sidewalks’; ha, ha, ha! Now then listen to this neat little business:

“Contributions will be gratefully received at the post-office.”

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Old Dave readjusted his spectacles, stepped closer to the notice and read the names of the committee.

“Mary Harley,” he repeated thoughtfully, “she’s the doctor’s daughter and her name is first on the list. Nobody knows what a girl is going to do nowadays. Susan Rider—bless me! if that ain’t Sue up yonder. The old man’s been in public business all his life and so Sue’s took it in her head to come right out before the public. She’s tired looking from the house door into the store, she’s in for helping to improve the town of Primrose Hollow. Katharine Dobson, no, I ain’t surprised; but that pretty little girl has got a lot of pluck. She’s handled the mail all right for more than a year, though some folks ain’t satisfied. So she’s going to help run a Boardwalk Committee along with the post-office and, no doubt, she’ll do her part. Elizabeth Tarr—that’s the lawyer’s girl. I seen her once and she didn’t speak, but that’s all right, that’s city manners. She’ll give presence to this here Boardwalk Committee and the old man he can do the lawing for them if there’s ever any lawing to be done. Ha, ha, ha! Bettie Porter—the widow’s daughter,

with her name last on the list. What's the meaning of that? I reckon it means as the widow's daughter is to wind up the boardwalk business and I reckon if anybody can do it Miss Bettie can. She's been ploughing up and down these here roads since she was knee-high to a grasshopper. Say, boys," Mr. Palmer turned his back upon the notice, thrust his hands into his pockets, put his feet a little wider apart, "what's your opinion of a boardwalk for the Hollow?"

"My opinion," answered the youngest of the boys uncrossing and recrossing his legs, "is that the Hollow is never going to have a boardwalk. It's had commotions before, the Hollow has; it's tried to erect a Union Church and it's begged and tried to borrow for a schoolhouse. Where's the Union Church and where's the schoolhouse?"

"The Union Church committee never gave us anything like that," remarked another of the boys, pleasantly, pointing over Mr. Palmer's shoulder to the notice. "According to my notion that reads like business, and like business that is going to go."

"A boardwalk in Primrose Hollow will cost considerable money," said another of the boys.

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"I reckon the committee hasn't calculated the amount. If they were to put the cost down on paper I shouldn't wonder if these here notices wouldn't disappear. Girls has got a lot of cheek but they're scary, too. In my opinion a well-finished example on the subject of the boardwalk for Primrose Hollow would about scatter the committee."

"I don't know," said Mr. Palmer; "somehow, I like to think that that there example you mention wouldn't scare them a bit. Some girls is smart."

"Yes, some girls is smart," said the young man who was of the opinion that the boardwalk would never be, "but isn't Stephen Caulk smart? Isn't it said that a smart fellow like Stephen Caulk ruined the chances for a Union Church in Primrose Hollow? Isn't it declared positively that Primrose Hollow would have got her school-house if it hadn't been for the smart interference of Stephen Caulk?"

"Girls ain't smart like Stephen Caulk," said the old farmer. "I'd be sorry to think that any girl in Primrose Hollow or anywhere in the United States was any way smart like Stephen

Caulk. Nor do I see," he added, "how any of us gentlemen can get out of handing in a contribution to the Boardwalk Committee. Boys, I'm going over to the post-office."

True to his word, Mr. Palmer ploughed through the mud and entered the post-office with a radiant countenance and an open purse. Upon making his intention known to Uncle Sam's loyal servant, that young lady, in a flutter of pleasurable excitement, came hastily out of her cage and directed the first contributor to the boardwalk fund to write his name together with amount contributed upon a large sheet of paper pasted underneath the notice, but above the rude little shelf whereon the patrons wrote postal cards and money-order applications.

Mr. Dave Palmer was, on occasion, a modest man. He did not put his name and contribution quite at the top of the large sheet of paper. He marked down the dollar mark and a two opposite his name and handed over a two dollar note to the grateful post-office clerk, after which good work he went out and returned with three of the boys, urging and encouraging them to follow his example. It did look like business

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surely when there were four contributions on the list.

A half hour later a little old man strongly built and wiry raised his keen eyes to the contribution list and read the four names and the amounts contributed. Then he dipped the post-office pen into the post-office ink, raised his arm and wrote busily in that space above the name and contribution of Mr. Dave Palmer.

Katharine Dobson did not rush out of her cage or even to the end of it to cry a grateful "thank you"; she was, instead, engaged in making up the accounts of Uncle Sam. Nor was she at all ecstatic, after the old man had gone, when she read over his contribution, wishing that Bettie Porter was by her side. The contribution read, "500 feet of oak boards, 300 ties and ten dollars' worth of hauling."

"If only," said the clerk, sighing, "the name of the contributor wasn't Stephen Caulk."

CHAPTER III

TWO TOASTS

"FIVE HUNDRED feet of oak boards, three hundred ties and ten dollars' worth of hauling." The numbers of the oak boards, the boards themselves, the number of the ties and the ties themselves followed Katharine Dobson out of the little post-office of Primrose Hollow and up the hill to the home of her grandfather, and there also followed her, rolling over the road as it were and up the narrow path to the very door of her grandfather's house that ten dollars' worth of hauling, the teams in first-class condition as was everything owned and looked after by Mr. Stephen Caulk.

"It's a shame," said the girl, shaking her curly head, "his name at the head of the list, too! But old man Caulk shall not be the undoing of the boardwalk. There are five of us girls, and Bettie Porter one of the five. If five women,"—instinctively she gave a pull to the

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front of her rather short skirt—"five sensible, good young women"—her smile was serene, "can't down one disagreeable, fusty old fellow like Stephen Caulk, then, I say, we all deserve to wade in the Primrose mud till Doomsday!"

"Grandfather," cried this sensible good young woman the next minute, rushing tumultuously in upon the smoky reverie of the aged postmaster, "what do you think?"

"Think?" questioned Mr. Dobson, vaguely. "What do I think, Katharine?"

"Yes," said the girl, "what *do* you think?"

She was by his chair, her hands on his shoulder and for an instant her pretty face was close to his. The rough skin of the old man gave her pleasure and the rough skin, in turn, felt pleasure from that contact with the velvety cheek. Outsiders might talk evil of this special good, sensible young woman, the public might rave against her management of Uncle Sam's affairs, but her brow was tranquil, her eyes were very bright and altogether it was a happy little girl's face softly pressing that of the aged postmaster.

"The Hollow is going to have a boardwalk, grandfather," said Katharine.

“What?” cried the old man. The daily paper on his knee, which he had been reading and dreaming over, fell to the floor, a thing inconsequent. “The Hollow going to have a board-walk, Katharine?” he queried. “Primrose Hollow? Us?”

“Us,” repeated Katharine, and laughed.

Her eyes were bright and merry, her cheek the softest thing that had ever come in close relation with the old man’s weather-beaten face; she played the organ in his little house, played it beautifully and sang like a bird, but it seemed to him, now as ever, now as when she was a toddler, all his own, that her laugh was the dearest sound in the universe, United States and every bit of it.

“Where’s it to run?” he asked, “this board-walk?”

“Everywhere,” she answered; “all through the town, up hill and down hill. There’ll be no more muddy shoes in Primrose Hollow. Who do you think is going to put it down, grandfather?”

“A fairy prince,” said Mr. Dobson, who now and then grew witty.

Of course the people of Primrose Hollow never heard the aged postmaster talking like this, with his little girl's arms stealing about his neck. If they had they would have declared, emphatically, that he had "clean lost his senses," and, thereupon, he would sans ceremonie have lost the post-office as well. He was a wise old gentleman, was Mr. Dobson, though his second guess was a degree wittier than his first.

His second guess was, "Stephen Caulk."

"Grandfather," said Katharine, growing grave, and she left that position by his chair with her arms around his neck and went down on her knees and then actually sat on the floor at his feet and this time wound her arms around his knees, the flighty creature, and looked up into his face with the truest eyes in the universe, United States included, of course.

"The girls of Primrose Hollow are going to build a boardwalk for the town," she said. "Bettie Porter and I planned it together and then we called in Sue Rider and Mary Harley and Elizabeth Tarr. We have formed a committee."

Katharine's truthful eyes danced at the word

"committee," and the dance was taken up and grew into a twinkle in the eyes of Mr. Dobson.

"And you are going to do it without calling in the aid of Stephen Caulk, the Primrose philanthropist?" asked the aged postmaster.

"Grandfather," acknowledged the flighty creature, shaking her curls, "I am scared to death about that old man. Mind you, he came into the post-office where we've tacked up a petition for contributions with a blank below, you know, for the names and amounts of the contributors, and he took the pen and wrote ——"

"Extinction to the idea?" asked the aged postmaster.

"His contribution," said Katharine, sorrowfully.

"How much?" asked her grandfather.

She rattled off her answer: "500 feet of oak boards, 300 ties and ten dollars' worth of hauling. The hauling is almost worse than the boards and the ties," she added, "for, of course, if he had his teams out in the interest of the thing, he'd want to rule the whole business."

"And spoil the whole business," thundered Mr. Dobson. "Why, in the name of reason,

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can't old man Caulk keep his finger off other people's pie? What are you young ladies going to do, say, Katharine?"

"Nobody knows anything about his donation, excepting me," said Katharine, sorrowfully. "When the committee meets, we'll discuss it and take action upon the issue, isn't that what you say?"

"Something like that, I think," said Mr. Dobson.

"You see, there are five of us, grandfather," said the girl.

"And only one of him," said the aged postmaster. "Well, I don't know, I don't know, but I never yet have seen the day on which Stephen Caulk couldn't knock a thing to smithereens if he had a mind to."

"I don't understand how a man can be so mean," declared the flighty creature. "I wish I had dared run my pen right through his old contribution and write him a note, stating that the committee had sat upon it and turned it down, or, to be more elegant, that we had taken action on the issue and decided not to accept anything he had to offer. Wouldn't that be fine?"

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be mailable matter," said Mr. Dobson. "Look here, little girl, don't you go and do anything that would get us into a scrape with Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam has been the one living benefactor to you and me. We don't owe overmuch to the Primrose people. They've sat on us pretty hard more than once. But for all that they are the public, and we're the servants of just such a cantankerous public, and Uncle Sam has treated us white."

"I wish Uncle Sam would give us a contribution," sighed Katharine.

"Instead of old man Caulk," said Mr. Dobson, and laughed.

The girl's laugh was bright and sweet, with music all through it, a something that the aged postmaster loved dearly to hear; his own laugh was short and a little gruff but it, too, was pleasant to somebody.

"If wishes were horses beggars could ride, and we wouldn't need a boardwalk, you and me, would we, grandfather?" said the girl.

But the old man showed a new side at this. He was proud. He straightened himself in his chair.

"There never was a Dobson yet," he declared, pompously, "who wasn't able to hold up his head and do more than earn his salt. There are folks in this town hot for the post-office, clean mad to get possession of it, but it isn't every man or woman who can handle the government's business, as the government knows very well. It wasn't always handled satisfactorily neither; but I guaranteed if the mail was put into my hands, it would be looked after properly. Talk of philanthropists! Who are they, anyway? Are they foolish fellows who throw around a little idle money that, like as not, they come by in a dishonorable fashion and are trying to even up things with the Creator while at the same time they gain the praise of man? Are such folks the true philanthropists? No. The true philanthropist in any nation, in any territory, in any city, town or hamlet, is the man who does his duty toward his fellows, be that duty what it may, and be his fellows prince or peasant or Uncle Sam himself. You hear me, Katharine?"

"Yes, grandfather," said Katharine, very politely, considering she had heard the same thing over and over very many times.

"And you agree with me?"

"Yes, indeed, I do, grandfather, heartily," said she, and jumped up from the floor, crying that she must get supper.

"Then we'll talk some more of the boardwalk," said she, turning in the doorway and smiling back.

"With Stephen Caulk left out," said the old man, chuckling.

"With Stephen Caulk left out, decidedly," said Katharine, grave as a judge.

"I tell you, grandfather," said Katharine, when the two of them were seated at the supper table, "Primrose Hollow will be a very different place from what it is, once we get the boardwalk. Bettie Porter, all these years, has had an awful time coming for the mail. She is dropping her overshoes continually."

"Old man Caulk wears gum boots," said the aged postmaster, reflectively. "Sits around in his slippers when he's home, I believe. Stands to reason that Miss Bettie would naturally be a better philanthropist than he."

"I should say so," said Katharine, also forgetting that "old man Caulk was to be left out de-

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cidedly" in that boardwalk conversation at the tea table. "Grandfather, I wonder what Bettie will say when she sees Mr. Caulk's contribution?"

"Something that Caulk wouldn't like to hear, I reckon, for all she's so ladylike," answered Mr. Dobson. "Yes, indeed," he went on, after sipping the coffee and finding it excellent, "Miss Bettie is a true lady; a trifle proud, perhaps, like the widow, but that's all right, blue blood is bound to show out. I always did approve of people holding up their heads. Let your head droop and down you go. I never yet knew a Dobson who didn't hold up his or her head. Miss Bettie has a pretty air about her, too; and never lets a nobody get the better of her in conversation. She's a plucky girl. If the widow had a little more of this world's goods and there was to come such a thing as a fight between old man Caulk and Bettie Porter, I'd be willing, although I'm not an advocate of betting, never won a bet in my life, I'd be willing to risk a few dollars on the widow's daughter. But when a body hasn't got any money worth speaking of, they can't make much of a show in a philanthropic fight. He ruined the prospects of the

Union Church, did old man Caulk; he good as tore up the plans of the schoolhouse, and I don't know, I don't know, but I kind of think that owing to that very liberal sounding contribution of his in there on the post-office walls where all the folks can see it, that he's going to tear up the boardwalk too, tear it clean up before it's down."

"Tear up the boardwalk before it's down, indeed he shan't!" cried Katharine, wrathfully. "There are five of us!"

"And only one of him," said the aged postmaster, "but that one is one too many."

"When there's one too many of anybody, grandfather, what ought the committee do?" asked the girl.

"When the committee has undertaken the building of a boardwalk in the muddiest region in the whole United States?" asked the aged postmaster, rather proudly.

"Yes," said the girl, "with Bettie Porter as president. What ought such a committee to do when there's one too many of anybody on the contribution list?"

"Look here, Katharine," said the old man, "some kind of things are ticklish. Now and

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then a man doesn't know how to decide; now and then affairs just have to straighten themselves. As a servant of the public, the wisest plan for you, little girl, is to let that one too many be; let him be, Katharine, let him be."

"Let him spoil the boardwalk?" cried Katharine. "Never!"

"I didn't say that," said the aged postmaster, "though I kind of calculate that Caulk will manage to do it; I simply said, let him be."

"The Union Church people let him be," said Katharine, "and what was the result?"

"Nothing where the Union Church ought to have been," said Mr. Dobson.

"The schoolhouse people let him be," said Katharine, "and what was the result of that action?"

"No schoolhouse," said Mr. Dobson.

"Well, grandfather," said Katharine, "the Boardwalk Committee of Primrose Hollow is not going to let Mr. Stephen Caulk tear up the boardwalk before it's down. The miserable fellow, to be ready to do it! He'll be glad enough to walk on it, I'm sure."

The aged postmaster chuckled. "There's

something in that," he said, "and you think old man Caulk wouldn't have bothered the Union Church and that he's got no use for a school-house? He'll be glad to walk on the board-walk, if he doesn't manage to tear it up before it goes down. Ha, ha! There's something in that."

"I know Bettie Porter is not calculating on his tearing it up before it's down," said Katharine, decidedly. "I wish to gracious she'd been in the post-office when he wrote his contribution. I was there all by myself and I couldn't say a word. I just stared and felt limp and funny all over, and when I read it, especially the hauling, a thunderbolt wouldn't have moved me."

"That was right," said her grandfather; "always bear in mind that you are in the employ of the government, and that Uncle Sam's employees act with discretion."

"If Bettie had been there maybe she and Mr. Caulk would have had it over at once and for all," sighed Uncle Sam's curly-headed employee. "Oh, how nice it would be to get rid of him at the beginning! Well, let him go, we said we weren't going to talk about him at the supper

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table, and I for one am hopeful that everything will come right."

Her grandfather looked at her shining face.

"Somehow I'm kind of hopeful too," he said. He raised the old-fashioned bowl that held his coffee. "May I drink to the welfare of the Boardwalk Committee of Primrose Hollow and consequently to the welfare of the boardwalk itself?"

Katharine's coffee was in a tea-cup. The girl laughed merrily, raised her cup and clicked it against the large old-fashioned bowl.

"To the prosperity of the Boardwalk Committee and Primrose Hollow and may it last until there's a boardwalk!" sang out the aged postmaster, but the girl said in her heart:

"To the end at the beginning of old man Caulk."

CHAPTER IV

THE MUNIFICENT DONATION

ELIZABETH TARR looked down at a copy of that "horribly emphatic" notice that she herself had typewritten at Bettie Porter's dictation, and it seemed to her both pithy and to the point. Of course in her secret heart Elizabeth was aware that had she been given time a more scholarly production might have issued from her brain and that servile instrument, the typewriter; but, after all, the Primrose people were hardly capable, taking them all in all, of fully appreciating a scholarly production, and Bettie Porter's hastily composed notice, with its references to the "zest of life" and "shoe leather" and other material things, was suitable in part and in whole.

"It'll fetch 'em," drawled Miss Tarr, in the voice of a Primrose farmer, and then she laughed. If Elizabeth had known what a different looking girl she was when she laughed, it is possible she might have left unsaid ever so many bits of wis-

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dom which necessitated a grave countenance and been content to show her white teeth more often.

"I dare say Bettie Porter knows what she's about," she concluded, after again reading the notice that, really, she must have known by heart or been dumber than she appeared, "and I'm sure everybody will be glad to have a boardwalk."

At this juncture Miss Tarr was interrupted by a voice, and Mary Harley, the doctor's daughter, came rushing in.

"Not reading a novel?" cried Mary, blithely. "Certainly not, it's the notice. Isn't Bettie Porter smart?"

Now Elizabeth was not the kind of young person to use the word, "smart," in reference to another girl; she said a "smart dress," a "smart team," etc. "She is quite clever," she answered.

"Clever, I should say so, and everybody knows it!" declared Mary, with great positiveness. "Here, let me read it." She took the notice, almost lovingly, into her hands. "It's the cutest thing," she went on. "If I had thought for a hundred years, I couldn't have written it. It

takes in all the people. Donations ought to pour upon us. Elizabeth Tarr, do you know that we five girls are going to do something grand?"

"Grand?" echoed Elizabeth, elevating her brows.

"Yes, indeed, grand!" repeated the doctor's daughter. "The boardwalk will be the greatest improvement Primrose has ever had. Oh, I know we have had individual improvements, as it were; you know what I mean, new houses and things like that; I never can express myself properly,—I always mean so much more than I say. The boardwalk will be for everybody, every man, woman and child; it will be a public benefit." She breathed softly, love for the whole of her dear little narrow world beaming in her eyes.

"We certainly need it," said Miss Tarr.

"It is a something, the boardwalk," continued Mary, eloquently, "that in other places is put down by the town, or, at least, by the men of the town, but here in Primrose Hollow five girls are just going to let people see what they can do; and yet you caught me up, Elizabeth Tarr, when I said 'Grand.' It is grand."

"I don't see how any one could be against it,"

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said the practical Miss Tarr, with just a hint of doubt in her voice.

"No one but a lunatic," said Mary, "and lunatics can go hang."

It wasn't an elegant expression, to be sure, and certainly not an expression that Miss Tarr would ever have composed on or off her typewriter, but a sudden gleam of her white teeth showed that she approved.

For a minute or two the girls were silent while through their busy young brains various sizes and shapes of lunatics were gliding. The stout lunatic in Elizabeth's brain was making a stump speech on the subject of the good old times being good enough for him and he was waving his arms dramatically and vociferously denouncing that marvelous improvement, the boardwalk. Let him go hang. Then there was a disagreeable old man who ought to be throwing out his dollars for the benefit of the Primrose citizens and keeping himself in the background, instead of making a terrible rumpus about girls' management. Let him, too, go hang.

Mary Harley broke the silence. "Bettie Porter is going to see the thing through," she said, "the

committee consisting of five girls is not to be meddled with," and Elizabeth realized that the Hollow's rich old gentleman had been troubling Mary but that she also had let him go hang, as proved by the satisfied expression of her face.

"Suppose we hunt up Sue Rider and the three of us journey to the post-office to see the contribution list and how it grows," proposed Mary, and Elizabeth rose cheerfully and carefully put the notice away in the drawer of her desk.

The girls entered the store in the hopes of finding Sue in the most accessible place, but her father was there only and smiled upon them, thinking they were customers. Mr. Rider smiled even more, however, when in a business-like manner Miss Tarr asked the whereabouts of Sue.

"Making taffy, I think," said he, "leastwise she came in here awhile ago, asked me for a little sugar and helped herself to several pounds. Like as not you'll find her in the kitchen."

In the kitchen Sue was, her sleeves rolled up, her round person enveloped in a huge gingham apron, her round face red but happy, and the taffy smelling very good.

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"We are on our way to the post-office to see if the contribution list is growing, Sue," explained Mary Harley.

"And we called for you to go with us," said Elizabeth.

"Yés?" said Sue, breathlessly. "Well, I'll be through in a few minutes. It's almost done. Girls, I've been thinking and thinking of lots of things."

"While the rest of us have been thinking of one," said Mary.

Sue gave a whistle, tasted the taffy and announced: "No, it's not burned," and hastily began pouring the liquid into a buttered dish. "It's a new recipe," she went on, "and I think it's going to be splendid. I've got to pull it, of course, but it won't take long. When I say I've been thinking of lots of things, I mean things to help us get money for the boardwalk. Look, isn't it beautiful! Say, girls, won't I be a more useful member of the Boardwalk Committee if I really and truly know how to make Baltimore taffy?"

Mary and Elizabeth laughed heartily, Sue was so dead in earnest, but as they watched her pliant hands the taffy grew lighter and lighter.

"It really is Baltimore taffy," said Miss Tarr.

"It really is," echoed the doctor's daughter.

The three of them were eating Baltimore taffy as they wended their way toward the post-office, feeling as they passed the station that more than one pair of eyes regarded them.

"How different everything will be when we have the boardwalk," said Sue, enthusiastically. "I wonder Bettie Porter didn't think of it long ago."

"In her cradle?" questioned Mary. "She'll be more apt to serve the village at eighteen."

"Is Bettie Porter that old?" asked Sue, who never could remember people's ages.

"Older," said Miss Tarr. "She is nineteen."

"She doesn't look it," said Sue.

When they reached the post-office the flighty creature jumped out of her cage to greet them, but she was obliged to jump back again even more precipitously for a citizen with an unbending countenance was loudly demanding three two-cent stamps.

"Katharine Dobson, I pity you," remarked Sue, her eyes staring after the purchaser of stamps as he quitted the office, slamming the door be-

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hind him. "I should say that important individual will not be able to get his letters ready for the noon mail."

"I should say," said Mary Harley, glancing at Elizabeth Tarr, "that that important individual was a—lunatic."

"We have come to look at the donations," explained Elizabeth Tarr, and Katharine was about to accompany the rest of the committee across the floor when another importunate citizen asked for his mail. She waited on him in a hurry.

"Well!" The girls who had enjoyed the taste of the real article in Sue's Baltimore taffy stood and stared at the first contribution to the boardwalk.

"Bettie Porter said that he wasn't to interfere," said Sue Rider.

"Who let him put his name down first?" cried Elizabeth.

"He's ruined everything that ever was attempted here in Primrose," said Mary Harley; "and, of course, he is going to ruin the boardwalk."

"Body and soul," said Elizabeth Tarr, growing smart. "Katharine Dobson," she went on ear-

nestly enough, "what was the use of Bettie Porter saying that he wasn't to be allowed to interfere when here he is with several lines at the very head of the list?"

"Bettie Porter was up home enjoying herself, I dare say, when he did it," said Katharine. "I was here all by myself. Of course I'm a moral coward. Certainly I ought to have rushed out at him and in the name of the committee ordered him to desist. It is possible Mr. Caulk might have turned on me and accused me of using Uncle Sam's office for outside business, but what of that? I should by all means at least have taken the pen away from him and hidden the ink. Say, girls, what made you all stay quietly in your homes while the act was being perpetrated?"

"Oh, you can make fun, Katharine Dobson," said Miss Tarr, flushing. "It's easy enough to do that; but it's not a light matter, let me tell you; and when you were here and didn't say a word it was like you were acquiescing, giving your consent."

"A partner in the crime or misdemeanor, as it were," said Katharine. "What would you have done under like circumstances, Elizabeth?"

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"I?" said Elizabeth, haughtily. "I would have said something."

"What?" demanded the flighty creature, indignantly.

"Something," repeated Elizabeth.

"Of course you will never tell any of us what," said Mary Harley. "I think I would have ordered him to 'Stop.'"

"If I weren't in the employ of the government I might have said something," murmured Katharine, sadly.

"Did *he* say anything, Katharine?" asked Sue Rider.

"*He?*" cried Elizabeth, scornfully. "*Say anything?* Certainly he said enough."

"What?" questioned Mary, curiously.

"Five hundred feet of oak boards, three hundred ties and ten dollars' worth of hauling," read Miss Tarr.

"Oh, I thought maybe he said something besides," said Mary. "You're not as literal as the rest of the world, Elizabeth."

Miss Tarr threw back her head. "I think," she said, "that 500 feet of oak boards and 300

ties are exceedingly literal, and also the ten dollars' worth of hauling."

"Too literal," groaned Sue. "Bettie Porter is the president of the Boardwalk Committee, what has she to say about it?"

"Are you speaking to me or to one of the others?" asked Katharine, still a little ruffled.

"To you, O silent and judicious servant of the public," said Sue.

"Well," said Katharine, not yet wholly appeased, "Bettie Porter hasn't said anything."

"She hasn't!"

It sounded like one voice, but it was three, all intense, vibrating, thoroughly indignant, a note of mutiny.

"She hasn't!"

Katharine, hearing it a second time, laughed.

"You and Bettie Porter are taking things very coolly, Katharine Dobson, I must say!" cried Sue, hotly.

"It's easy enough to talk big, easy enough to preach," said Mary Harley.

"It is easier to preach to ten thousand than to follow mine own preaching," quoted, or per-

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haps misquoted, Elizabeth Tarr. "We might have known that Bettie Porter was only bragging when she declared that Stephen Caulk was not to have anything whatever to do with the building of the boardwalk."

"She could have written him a letter," said Sue.

"Certainly she could," acquiesced Miss Tarr.

"It's just as easy to write a letter as to preach," said Mary Harley, with conviction, "easier, I believe."

"A thousand times easier," said Elizabeth.

"Because nobody's about to jump on you," said Sue.

"Well, Bettie Porter has not, to my knowledge or belief, written Mr. Caulk a letter, or a postal or anything," said Uncle Sam's employee.

Three pairs of indignant eyes exchanged glances.

"And she's the president!" flared Miss Tarr.

Then the attention of the post-office clerk was called off and she was busy for fully half an hour, making out an intricate and exceedingly troublesome money-order, one to go to a foreign country, which nearly sent her up the hill to consult

with her grandfather when suddenly an inspiration came to her and she got it right.

At the termination of this bit of Uncle Sam's business, via Miss Katharine Dobson, clerk, the three intruding members of the Boardwalk Committee regarded that curly-headed young woman with a trifle more respect.

"Surely, Katharine, Bettie Porter expressed an opinion about *that?*" said Sue, pointing to the contributors' list and speaking so politely that the ruffled clerk was mollified.

"Bettie Porter doesn't know anything about it yet," she explained. "I was dying to run up to tell her, but I didn't even get the chance to send her a note. You girls are free," she added, a little bitterly, "but if I were to write a note in lead pencil and send it up to Bettie Porter by her own man servant, John Dines, if anybody saw me do it, likely as not that person would be mean enough to write to the government saying that I made unlawful use of the post-office; and I didn't have any time to write her a regular stamped letter."

The three visitors regarded the flighty creature with sincere compassion.

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"You certainly do have a life of it," said Elizabeth Tarr.

"There certainly is a lot of meanness afloat in Primrose," said Mary Harley.

"Would they have sent the post-office inspector here just for a little thing like that?" asked Sue, her eyes round with excitement. "Would they?"

"Oh, yes," said Katharine, "they'd have sent him all right, and he'd have scared grandfather and me most to death and been furious because he'd been sent for nothing. You have no idea, girls, what it is to be a public servant. Go home and thank God that you lead private lives."

"We're more likely to thank God right here for this special favor," said Mary Harley. "Katharine, you'd better close your mail bag; the train man is coming for it in a run."

"In a gallop, you mean," said Sue, staring out the window. "I declare, Katharine, you have the patience of holy Job."

"More, Job was a private citizen, I think," said Katharine, grabbing her mail bag, stuffing in the letters and locking it with a flourish.

"There! it's ready!" she said, throwing the bag out from the cage to the train man.

"I hope I get it strung up in time," he said, and walked off leisurely enough.

Katharine looked at the clock. "He has plenty of time," she said; "it's just one of his particularly mean days. Girls, holy Job's patience was nothing to mine."

"I believe you," said Mary Harley. "He's walking all the way. Of course, the train's not coming yet."

"Don't you think we ought to go up to see Bettie Porter and tell her what Mr. Caulk has done?" asked Sue, returning to the subject most important to them all. "Katharine, can't you manage to go along?"

"I hardly dare take the time to swallow my lunch," said the post-office clerk. "I'd go with you gladly if I could, for, of course, Bettie ought to know. There's no telling what plans Mr. Caulk has been making ever since he walked in here and struck me dumb by writing his donation."

Bettie Porter was not very much surprised to see three members of the Boardwalk Committee coming up the walk of the widow's yard, but even from her window she realized that they were on business bent.

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"Well?" she inquired, meeting them at the door.

"We thought you ought to be told," said Sue.

"Katharine said that you didn't know a thing about it and that she couldn't get a note to you and so we thought we'd come up at once," said Mary Harley.

"It is outrageous!" said Miss Tarr.

Bettie invited them into the parlor and drew up the blinds in a hurry. Although she occupied the honorable position of President of the Boardwalk Committee the widow's daughter was decidedly flurried and a little pale as she inquired:

"What in the world is the matter?"

"The matter is," said Mary Harley, "that you haven't seen the contributors' list and don't know what's going on, and you're the president and you ought to."

"He intends giving us 500 oak boards and 300 ties and ten dollars' worth of hauling, Bettie Porter!" cried Elizabeth Tarr.

"Which means he is ready to run the whole show," said Sue, hotly.

"You mean ——" began Bettie.



"WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?" DEMANDED MISS TARR.

"Stephen Caulk, of course," thundered the three voices.

The widow's daughter had been standing ; so, indeed, had they all, but at the name of Stephen Caulk the four girls sat down.

"Katharine Dobson let him do it and never said a word," declared Mary Harley.

"Well, you know, she can't lose her office," said Sue, taking up the cudgels for the absent member of the committee. "But Bettie, you said, you know you did, that Stephen Caulk should not interfere."

"I know I did," said Bettie, forlornly.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Miss Tarr.

"I don't know," said Bettie, speaking as forlornly as before.

"Time will tell, I suppose," said Elizabeth Tarr, elevating her eyebrows while in her voice there was that cynicism which evidently she had inherited from her father, the lawyer.

The president flushed under the cynicism.

"Girls," she said, earnestly, "look here. We have banded ourselves together in a good purpose. Perhaps it isn't going to be an easy thing

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to build a boardwalk for Primrose Hollow. I said that Mr. Caulk should not interfere and he shan't; we mustn't let him; but just how we are to act to prevent his interference I cannot say. I think that it will be wise for us not to pay any attention to his offer of lumber and hauling. Oh, I wish he wasn't so miserably mean!"

"Why don't you write him a letter, Bettie, and say right out that we, the Boardwalk Committee of Primrose Hollow, prefer his keeping out of the thing?" proposed Mary Harley.

"It wouldn't be politic," said Bettie. "He'd have a perfect right to answer that he didn't know he was in the thing."

"But if we accept his donation, he is in it; in it with a vengeance," said Sue Rider; "and we're all so interested and ready to do our part! Why, when the girls came after me this morning I was just trying a new recipe and have succeeded in making some of the grandest Baltimore taffy you ever tasted."

"Baltimore taffy?" echoed Bettie, vaguely wondering.

"Yes," said Sue, growing businesslike, "we'll have to make money in every conceivable way,

and I thought that in case we ever have a festival or anything I'd not donate any more failures in the shape of chocolate creams."

At the memory of Sue's chocolate creams the woes of the four members of the committee for an instant faded away. They, the chocolate creams, were so ill-shaped and sticky that even the mothers at a Fourth of July picnic had ordered their boys and girls to quit buying "them dirty things."

"Yes," said Elizabeth Tarr, soberly, "the Baltimore taffy was all right."

"Suppose," said Bettie, brightening, "that we go ahead with the things we can accomplish and not trouble trouble till trouble troubles us. Oak boards, even 500 feet of them, and ties and hauling on paper will never hurt us. We've got to keep a stiff upper lip—isn't that the expression?"

Elizabeth and Mary and Sue looked earnestly at Bettie, agreeing with her, and then Sue said, enthusiastically :

"Bettie Porter, I believe you can do it."

CHAPTER V

AN IMAGINARY CAKE

BETTIE PORTER's evening receptions were always appreciated by her Primrose friends. She might and possibly would have had them in the afternoon had it not been that Katharine Dobson's duties kept her from the mildest form of daytime dissipation. There was tea at these receptions, served in dainty cups that were a remnant of the widow's better days, and there were thin slices of bread and butter tasting delicious; but the principal feature of a certain reception, held in the widow's parlor very soon after the formation of the Boardwalk Committee, was neither tea nor bread and butter nor even Mrs. Porter's crisp little sugar cakes that the committee loved to distraction. The principal feature was really nothing more nor less than an imaginary cake, a large cake, of course, but whether pound or sponge or a layer cake it is impossible to say. This is how it happened:

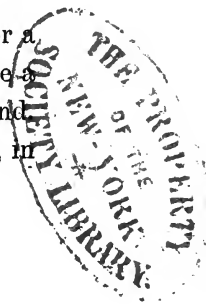
Elizabeth Tarr brought up a dismal story while she sipped tea from her pretty little relic of a cup. "Once, when my mother was young, she knew some people," she said, "girls like us, who, also like us, were bent upon improving their town. It wasn't a boardwalk they wished to build but it was something, I forget what, only they were just as eager over the matter as they could be, all of them willing to help and there were summer boarders in the neighborhood and they were going to have a picnic in the woods."

"The summer boarders or the girls?" asked Mary Harley.

"The girls, of course," said Miss Tarr, elevating her brows.

"That was a good idea," said Sue. "Oh, dear, I wish it was summer and that we were going to have a picnic in the woods. It would be easy enough to make money then. I'd have a stand with 'Baltimore Taffy' printed over it."

"I'd have the lemonade table and hope for a hot day," said Mary Harley, "or else I'd have a fish-pond. There's loads of money in a fish-pond. I like the wooden fish with numbers on them, in



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a tub of water, you know, and you fish them out with real fishing hooks, lines and rods and everything. It pleases the children to death. Then the bundles are numbered, too, but I guess you all have seen it. I'd beg the whole neighborhood for fish-pond articles and wouldn't let a soul off. Little nigger babies made out of rags are awfully funny and then one can buy no end of penny articles and get four cents profit on each. If we ever do have a picnic for the boardwalk, remember that I speak now for the fish-pond unless it's a screeching hot day when I want the lemonade table."

"Remember that I speak for the Baltimore Taffy stand," said Sue.

"I think," said Bettie, "that we might let Elizabeth finish her story."

"I think so, too," said Katharine.

An offended air had stolen upon Miss Tarr. "Oh, if they don't care to listen, they needn't," she said.

"Pardonez-moi, mademoiselle," murmured Mary Harley. "Girls, it was all my fault, I broke the thread; I promise, on my honor, as a member of the Boardwalk Committee, not to

do it again. Elizabeth, don't be foolish, you know we're all willing to listen. Go on, what else did your mother say?"

"Tell us all about it," said Katharine, who with great difficulty had kept from breaking forth regarding her idea of a day in the woods, making money for the boardwalk. "Already you have given the committee digestible food. Tell us what your girls did when they planned to put up a bridge."

"Put up a bridge?" cried Elizabeth.

"Or pull it down or something," said the post-office clerk.

"I didn't say a word about a bridge," declared Elizabeth. "Did I, Bettie?"

"Not to my knowledge," said Bettie.

"No, you didn't," said Sue, emphatically; "you just said the girls were going to make some improvement in the town, nobody knew what."

"I said *I* didn't know what," corrected Elizabeth, "that I had forgotten."

"You said there were summer boarders in the neighborhood and that the girls had made up their mind to have a picnic. It was the picnic

that set us off, starting with Sue's Baltimore taffy," said Mary Harley.

"Well, don't let Sue get on the taffy again, for pity's sake," said Katharine. "Elizabeth Tarr, what did they do?"

"Well, they had the picnic," said Elizabeth, "and this was one of the things that happened at the cake table."

"Some one better speak for the cake table in case we have a picnic," said Mary Harley, "for even if it's a cool day cake always sells with the ice cream, and, thank goodness! the Primrose people will eat ice cream if it half freezes them."

"Mary Harley, can't you listen to Elizabeth?" pleaded the post-office clerk.

"Can't you be polite, Mary Harley?" said Sue. "I'm sure I've hushed talking of the taffy. But do you know what mamma said about that I made the other day? She said she couldn't tell it from the kind she used to buy in Baltimore, and as for papa, he'd be pleased to death if I'd make him some to sell in the store. But I won't yet awhile, I want the thing to be new. I won't make any more now until I make it to sell for the boardwalk."

"Sue Rider," said Mary Harley, "can't you be polite?"

"It doesn't make a bit of difference to me," said Elizabeth, haughtily; "If you don't care to listen you needn't."

"Oh, go long and tell us about it," pleaded Katharine.

"Was the thing a success?" inquired Bettie.

"It was and it wasn't," answered Elizabeth. "One of the boarders came up to the cake table and asked for a slice of cake; and the girl at the table was cutting her a slice when she ——"

"The girl or the boarder?" asked Sue, "and Oh, do tell us was the boarder a man?"

"The boarder was a lady," said Elizabeth, tartly, "and she said, 'Oh, I don't want that cake, I want a slice of this,' indicating the largest and finest cake on the table. The girl very politely explained to her that she didn't intend cutting that cake, she intended to sell it whole, and the boarder took a slice of the other cake and went off and the girl didn't even dream she was mad."

"But she was mad?" queried Katharine.

"Raving mad," said Elizabeth, "although none

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of the girls giving the picnic knew anything about it—at the time.”

“So the picnic was a success then?” said Sue.

“She said that it was and it wasn’t,” said Bettie.

“How wasn’t it?” cried Katharine.

“It rained before supper,” said Elizabeth, “and they had to auction off the things in a hurry, the auctioneer standing in a covered wagon with the eatables and the men all around under the trees. The women and children for the most part were crowded into their own or other people’s carriages. My mother says it was awful. However, the girls cleared a right nice sum considering that it did rain.”

“Not enough to build the bridge, I suppose?” said Katharine.

“They hadn’t raised as much money as they needed for their improvement,” said Miss Tarr, slightly elevating her brows at that repetition of the word “bridge,” “and the next thing they planned was this: They would get somebody to bake them a very fine cake and they would call a meeting of the committee in the schoolhouse and ask the boarders to come. They would ask

two of the boarders to raffle the cake, after getting the chances right there in the schoolhouse."

"Men?" asked Sue Rider.

"Of course," said Elizabeth, and taking up the thread of her story she went on: "You see, the boarders loved to take chances in things, just for the fun of it, and the girls thought this would please them, and that they would like being invited to the meeting. So they all were invited and two of the men were asked if they would come and raffle off the cake, and they said that they would, with pleasure, and that everybody would come."

"I wish we had a number of summer boarders in the Primrose neighborhood and that it was summer," sighed Sue.

"Be polite and listen, Sue Rider," said Mary Harley. "Well, what happened after that? Go on."

"They begged a beautiful cake," said Elizabeth, "and the girls were at the schoolhouse early, waiting for the boarders. They waited a long time, and ——"

"Didn't the mean things come?" cried Katharine Dobson.

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“None of them?” screamed Mary Harley.

“Elizabeth Tarr, didn’t even the men come?” cried Sue Rider, her round face glowing with righteous indignation.

“After the girls had begged the cake, too, and invited them, and they said they would come? Well!” exclaimed Bettie Porter.

“Elizabeth Tarr, break in upon your four impolite listeners and put us out of our misery,” besought Mary Harley. “Didn’t anybody come?”

“They sat there and waited and nobody came,” said Elizabeth. “That woman who had refused the slice of cake at first and then had taken it and actually gone away from the table eating it, without showing in the least that she was mad, why she ——”

“What did she do?” demanded Sue Rider, hotly.

“She gave it out among the other boarders, mind you, that the girls had the same cake down in the schoolhouse, after keeping it two or three weeks, and that they intended getting it off on them, thinking them greenhorns. Wasn’t it mean? And the cake couldn’t have been

any fresher, my mother says, without falling to pieces, and she knows what she's talking about because she was there."

"Was she one of the girls, Elizabeth?" asked Mary Harley.

Miss Tarr nodded.

"Gracious! I'm glad we haven't any summer boarders here in Primrose," said Sue. "Just suppose we had a lot like that and it was summer, and the same thing had happened to us? The Hollow people may be plain but when they're invited anywhere and say that they're coming, they come. Elizabeth Tarr, do you mean to tell us that the two men who had promised to raffle the cake failed to put in an appearance?"

"They were seen passing the door," said Miss Tarr, "and the girls called them in, and, of course, they didn't say what was the matter only that there had been some misunderstanding, and of course everybody saw that the thing was a failure, and ——"

Here three of the committee were impolite enough to interrupt the story, asking in a breath:

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"What did they do with the cake?"

"I hope they ate it and enjoyed it and didn't give the men any," said Katharine.

"I hope they sent a tiny piece to that stingy old boarder just to let her see how nice and fresh it was," said Sue.

"I hope they never had anything more to do with the boarders," said Mary Harley.

"Elizabeth Tarr, finish your story, what did they do with the cake?" demanded Bettie Porter.

But Elizabeth's story had reached its point. "My mother never told me what they did with the cake," she said.

"Suppose," said Katharine Dobson, "that this thing would happen to us. Bettie Porter, you are the president of the Boardwalk Committee. Under similar circumstances, what, in the name of goodness, would you have done with the cake?"

"I?" said Bettie, and laughed a little and thought a little, while a faint glow came into her pretty cheeks. "I would have raffled it."

"To the committee?" screamed Sue Rider. "Bettie Porter, I didn't know you were so mean."

"You wouldn't have made much on the cake, that's certain," said Mary Rider.

"Would you have had the cheek to ask and expect the two men to make up for the deficiencies of the rest of the boarders?" asked the post-office clerk. "After all, Bettie, even if they did sneak around the schoolhouse they were there. I reckon they felt bad too. But I trust, under similar circumstances, that you'd make it clear that Primrose Hollow didn't cheat even with a cake."

"This is what I would have done or would do under like circumstances," said the president of the Boardwalk Committee, speaking slowly and distinctly: "I would summarily dismiss the subject of the cake and go on with the boardwalk business, even if I felt flurried. Then, on the following day, I would put on my best bib and tucker, get a nice looking girl or boy to carry the cake, take my chance book, and go all through the place, smiling my sweetest. I would smile my very sweetest on the summer boarders, laugh at the foolishness of anybody for a minute thinking we were trying to get off an old cake, extoll the freshness of the cake to-

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gether with all its other merits until the summer boarders were hungry for it, and I'd fill my chance book without any very great degree of trouble."

"In other words," said Katharine, "you'd coax your friends and shame your enemies into taking chances on the cake?"

"Yes," said Bettie, and laughed.

"Here in Primrose," said Sue Rider, "like as not, a motion like that would set all the people talking."

"Citizens and strangers, too," said Mary Harley.

"Yes," agreed Katharine, sorrowfully, "so many people are in public business and almost everybody is afraid to make any sort of independent move. Suppose, Bettie, you couldn't succeed in getting a nice-looking girl or boy to carry the cake! You never said you would ask the rest of the committee to accompany you. Suppose you couldn't get anybody—then, what would you do?"

"Go it alone," said Bettie.

"Surely she could get the committee to accompany her," said Mary Harley.

"She could at first, if she went about it quietly," said Katharine. "Of course I know we'd all be willing to help with the cake procession, but I can well imagine that two or three weeks after a boardwalk picnic in the woods all the Primrose public servants would be rumpusing. Grandfather, like as not, would be ordering me to work privately, and as for Dr. Harley and Mr. Rider and ——"

"My father may be last but he isn't least, Miss Rider," said Elizabeth Tarr, with a contemptuous little bow. "I really don't think I would care to carry a cake through Primrose Hollow even though I was working in the interest of the boardwalk."

"Then, Bettie, what would you do?" asked Katharine.

"Go it alone," repeated Bettie.

Now it was innocent enough for a number of girls, for the Committee of the Boardwalk in fact, to talk in this manner about an imaginary cake, which, as has already been stated, might have been a pound cake or a sponge cake or a layer cake. Very innocent indeed were both the subject and the conversation thereon, with very

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much righteous indignation in the latter. And surely if a little righteous indignation, of which there is always plenty somewhere, was expended, later on, upon a Primrose girl, no other than Bettie Porter herself, for saying that she would, if necessary for the welfare of her beloved boardwalk, carry a cake through the Hollow, that she would drum up all the chances that she could; even though raffling was to a certain extent frowned down upon in the quiet town, that, too, was innocent enough, or ought to have been. But idle repetition even of an innocent something often causes trouble.

As the four members of the committee descended the hill from the widow's house, after fully enjoying the tea in those delicate old-fashioned cups and the thin slices of bread and butter and the dear little sugar cakes as well, they were full of praise of the president, Bettie Porter, and they said enthusiastically that she was a brick.

"And she would do it," said her friend, Katharine Dobson, "mark my words, Bettie Porter would walk through this place, all by herself, carrying that cake."

"Yes, she would do it, if everybody was talking," said Mary Harley, "and her mother would think it was all right. Why isn't everybody like Mrs. Porter? It seems to me that her views are so sensible."

"They are, indeed," said Sue Rider. "But I tell you how it will be if ever Bettie Porter goes around with her cake. Not one of us will be allowed to accompany her, and all of us would go except you, Elizabeth."

"Perhaps I would go, too," said Miss Tarr. "Anybody but a bigot can change his mind."

"Not one of us would be allowed to accompany her," said Sue, decidedly; "or, if we started out with her, we'd be stopped, I at the store and be shamed before everybody. It isn't pleasant to be treated like you were a little girl when you're not. Yes, we'd all be stopped, but Bettie Porter would go on."

"And everybody would talk," said Elizabeth Tarr, proving herself no bigot in the rapidity of her changes of ideas. "I don't know what those other girls did with the cake, but I'm sure they didn't carry it through the town."

"Oh, of course, everybody will talk," said Sue,

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returning to Bettie's cake, which was after all much more important than that other cake eaten when Mrs. Tarr was a girl, "some of them will rave, and the rest of us on the committee will have to keep quiet till the thing has calmed down. But do you know, in the end, who will be most appreciated in Primrose? The girl who carried the cake; that's human nature."

"Human nature is a strange, strange thing," said Katharine Dobson. "Girls, I'd like to see Bettie Porter going around with the cake."

"So would I," said Mary Harley, "but I would advise her not to do it until near the completion of the boardwalk."

Such was the talk among those four members of the committee as they blithely wended their way homeward down the Primrose hill. A shame it is to think that in a not very far away future the imaginary cake, layer or pound or sponge or whatever it might be, should prove itself a source of gossip and a menace to a girl's fair fame.

Human nature is a strange, strange thing.

CHAPTER VI

OLD MAN CAULK

THE outside of Mr. Stephen Caulk's residence was red brick with a slate roof and a bay window, and about these things the Primrose people had ever so many things to say, and there had, at the time of its building, been hot disputes in stores and shops as to the exact value of brick and slate and the cost of a round bay window in comparison to a square bay window. As has already been stated the outside of Mr. Caulk's residence, although there was a windmill in the yard, showing that there ought to be if there wasn't a "bath," had no attractions for the seekers of summer board who, on more than one occasion, had stepped off the cars at the Hollow station, wandered through the place, all eyes, and finally besought Mrs. Porter to take them in. To her peace of mind the widow had been relentless to such entreaties.

Nor would the inside of the rich man's domi-

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cile have held any fascination for the lovers of the picturesque and beautiful. It was comfortable, to be sure, though in the summer time it was not as well aired as it might have been, for the housekeeper was old and rheumatic and not in the habit of tiring herself "histing winders fer nothing." Stephen Caulk's parlor was a man's parlor and his library was an ugly little room in which tobacco smoke was more noticeable than the books. As to the dining-room, the old housekeeper had learned, in some unaccountable manner, that a dinner table could be adorned with doylies instead of a cloth, and so, for the sake of economizing with the table-cloths and saving the wash, Mr. Caulk's dinner table was adorned at each meal and between times with four or five stiffly starched doylies. The old gentleman's dining chair, it is true, was a commodious thing and had once been called by John Dines, "a kind of a throne or some'n," but even it would not have appealed to a summer boarder. Thus, in ugly comfort the old man lived, for the up-stairs of his house corresponded with the down-stairs.

Volumes of tobacco smoke filled the musty

little library, completely hiding the solitary bookcase in the corner and almost enveloping the old man busily writing at his desk before the window. He was brisk and businesslike always, was Stephen Caulk, and what with his buying and selling of grain and straw and hay and implements, what with his mortgages on two-thirds of the neighborhood farms and his large interests in distant coal fields to say nothing of his half dozen sawmills and his houses in Primrose Hollow, he had no desire for idleness.

The old housekeeper went slipping along the hall, paused and glanced at her master through the doorway. She was not an imaginative person; she was not set to wondering by that quick scratching of the pen on the paper; she was thinking phlegmatically: "The library needs sweeping but I'll have to wait till he gets out."

Then, wonderful to relate, Stephen Caulk laid down his pen, whirled about in his office chair and actually sat smoking in apparent idleness, his keen little eyes staring out the library window.

He could see, from his position, a part of the

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graveled walk, a half of the unplayful fountain, an end of the fluttering United States flag. Was he dreaming of the stars and stripes and the fullness of their meaning, or was he planning to let the fountain play after its years of silence? Perhaps the heavily graveled path claimed his calm attention and he was comparing our American roads with the roads of Napoleon and not believing all that he had heard in disparagement of the former and in hearty praise of Napoleon's work.

Had the old housekeeper lingered long enough in the doorway to see this unusual proceeding of old man Caulk, and had she guessed that he was dreaming of roads, she would, in the language of the enthusiastic little American high-spyer, have been "hot," for old man Caulk was thinking of the boardwalk of Primrose Hollow.

No, he was not idle. Up the hills and through the hollows the boardwalk in his busy brain extended. There would have to be grading, here and there steps to the road, the whole wouldn't look bad when finished. He forgot that five girls were eager in the enterprise though at the same time he remembered that contribution

paper on the wall of the post-office, and he thumped his fist upon his knee as he wondered how much such and such a man would contribute.

"There's no use doing a thing at all if you don't do it well," concluded old man Caulk.

He got out of his chair and hunted downstairs and up-stairs for his housekeeper. He found her on the second floor, in a back room, busily sweeping.

"What do you think," he said, abruptly, "the Hollow people have at last awakened to the up-to-date notion that there's no sense in walking in the mud any longer. We're going to improve the town by a boardwalk."

"I heered," said the housekeeper, keeping her eyes on her dust heap, "that the gals here was gitting it up, the widow's datter and Sue Rider and them. I dunno how it'll work. I'll wait and see."

"You think a walk is needed, eh?" questioned Mr. Caulk.

"I'm used to walking in the mud," said the housekeeper. "Them as ain't used to it better keep away from Primrose."

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“You don’t believe in improvements?”

“I reckon I believe in ’em much as most of the Primrose people,” said the housekeeper, her eyes leaving the dust heap and traveling over the little old man from the toes of his slippers to the top of his gray head and then roaming out the window to the road and across the road to the long, lean, unpainted house. “I don’t know as Bettie Porter and Sue Rider and them is a stronger party than the Union Church people.”

“Hump!” said the old man.

“I dunno,” continued the housekeeper, “as Bettie Porter and Sue Rider and them is stronger’n the schoolhouse folks.”

“Hump!” said the old man again.

The “Hump!” was expressive of all sorts of things but the housekeeper’s few words had brought up the five girls distinctly. He knew them all, the widow’s daughter particularly, for over and over again had he seen Bettie Porter putting on her overshoes, and, perhaps, in a dim way, had marveled at the patience of woman. The five girls were in the thing, their names stared out at you from the post-office wall and

everywhere else, they were the "Boardwalk Committee," there was no use trying to arrange matters without them.

"They'll get on all right, I believe," he said, "with a good business manager to lead them."

"Meaning himself," thought the old housekeeper, as the master left her to her sweeping. "I dunno but I kind of pity him. 'Tain't no use being so everlasting fusty. Maybe them gals can git along without him; git along with him they won't. I dunno anybody but me ever did git along with him. He never gits along with nobody 'cepting when he has his own way all through and I know enough of the widow's datter and Sue Rider and them to feel sure and certain they'll want their own way too. I'm used to the Primrose mud; and nobody don't ketch me making up my mind that the Holler people is gunno git sidewalks. He'll spile the walk like he spiled the Union Church and the schoolhouse, but, I dunno, I kind of pity him.

"There he is out a-measuring," said old man Caulk's stolid housekeeper, half an hour later, "in front of his own house first, of course," and again, in her heart, she kind of pitied him for

his loneliness and his selfishness and all the rest of it.

The widow saw Stephen Caulk measuring and she thought he was preparing for a new fence though surely there was no need of it. She was interested and went up-stairs so that she could see him more plainly. "I declare," she said, "he's past his own yard and is still measuring; it can't be a new fence."

A man on a team watched old man Caulk and formed an opinion. "He's up thar," said the man on reaching his destination, the Fairbank scales, for he was hauling baled straw to the station, "up thar in the road and he's a-measuring."

"Who?" demanded the clerk engaged in weighing the straw.

"Why, old man Caulk."

"What's he a-measuring?"

"I dunno, but I kind of imagine he's got a notion that the road's took a slice of his front yard. Looked that away."

"More likely old man Caulk's took a slice of the road," said the weigher. "I reckon lawing in that direction would see the road come out on top."

"There's no counting on the law," said the teamster, "and old man Caulk is slippery."

"Slippery as an eel," said the weigher, and the subject dropped.

But Sue Rider saw Stephen Caulk at his work and she rushed into the home of the widow, her mind agitated.

"Where's Bettie?" she asked.

"Down at the post-office, I think," said the widow.

"I wonder," thought Sue, as she went down the hill, almost running, "if I'll have time to get Elizabeth and Mary? We all ought to be together. Yes, when anything important is to be told, it ought to be announced in the presence of the whole committee; otherwise there'll be somebody to fuss."

She darted in at the doctor's without knocking, and ran through the house, calling, "Mary!"

Mary was taking life easy in a wrapper, while she tranquilly knitted; she was making a pair of bedroom slippers.

"What's the matter?" she cried, starting up.

"I want you to go to the post-office with me right away," said Sue; "Bettie Porter is there,

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and Katharine Dobson, of course, and I'll run over for Elizabeth Tarr while you get into a dress. I've something very important to say to the Boardwalk Committee."

"I'll be ready in two minutes," said Mary, hastily stuffing her knitting into her work basket and beginning to unfasten her wrapper as she went up-stairs.

In an incredibly short space of time Miss Rider stood before the lawyer's shining door-plate and failed to wonder if it was or wasn't silver, while she waited impatiently for an answer to her ring.

Elizabeth was at home and saw her immediately.

"Thank goodness you are not in a wrapper," said Sue, at which Miss Tarr elevated her eyebrows.

"Mary Harley was ; she always is," explained Sue.

"Therefore *she* wouldn't do and you came for *me*?" said Elizabeth, her lip curling. "Thank you ever so much, Miss Rider."

She was about to cry "Dummy !" but remembered in time that Elizabeth was "touchy" and

refrained. "You don't understand me at all," she said, with a mild accent of exasperation in her voice. "I want both of you, and if you were in your wrapper, too, I'm afraid we wouldn't catch Bettie Porter in the post-office and then we'd all have to wait until night."

"What for?" asked Elizabeth, growing interested.

"I have an announcement to make to the Boardwalk Committee," said Sue; "and, you understand, Bettie Porter is at the post-office, and I'm trying to get us all there."

Miss Tarr was ready in a minute.

Sue waved toward Mary's bedroom window and received an answering wave from a towel, after which Mary came bounding down the steps of the doctor's house and joined them in the mud below the Fairbank scales.

"Sue," she said, "I'm all in a flutter, my heart and everything. You frightened me and I dressed so quickly. I really believe I have the heart disease."

"Your father says you haven't, Mary," said Elizabeth.

"Doctors don't know everything," said Mary.

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"Sue, there may be somebody in the post-office and we'll have to wait. Tell us what it is out here."

"I believe in being businesslike," said Sue, "and this is important, horribly important." She turned for an instant and stared back up the road in the region of the widow's house.

"If you'd found Bettie Porter at home you'd have told her," said Mary, jealously.

"Don't let's fuss," said Sue, and hurried on.

As Mary had predicted, some one was in the post-office besides Bettie and Katharine and the latter was engaged making out a money-order while the former was seated on the post-office bench waiting in all patience and good-humor.

The rest of the committee sat down on the bench with the president.

"What's Katharine doing?" asked Mary Harley, speaking in a low voice to Bettie.

"Writing a money-order," responded Bettie.

"She certainly takes quite a time to do it," said Miss Tarr.

After the money-order was written and the man had pondered over it and decided that it was all right, the clerk's time was taken up for

another five minutes in the business of selling stamps and answering all sorts of difficult questions about the postal laws regulating the transmitting of money-orders, etc., etc.

"Sue Rider has something important to say to the Boardwalk Committee," Mary Harley whispered to the president.

"To me?" said Bettie. "What?"

"To all of us," said Elizabeth Tarr. "She holds the secret in her heart."

"I was up at your house but you weren't there," said Sue. "Thank heaven, he's going."

"Going, going, going, gone!" Miss Harley uttered the last word gratefully and dramatically as the post-office door went to with a slam behind the purchaser of money-order and stamps.

"How-do-do!" said Katharine. "What's up?"

"I am," cried Sue Rider, rising to her feet, while the others followed her example and the whole of the Boardwalk Committee gathered together in the centre of the little office. "Dear me! I don't see how I can be making fun; I certainly don't feel like it. I was going along the road, coming toward home, Bettie Porter, when I suddenly saw something."

"Why, I thought you intended telling us something about the boardwalk, about a donation or a mean man who wouldn't give us anything," said Mary Harley. "Bettie, Sue Rider came to our house, pale as a ghost, and rushed on me and ordered me to dress in such a hurry that she scared me nearly to death. My heart's fluttering yet. I can't help what my father says, Elizabeth Tarr, I really do believe I have heart disease. And all that racket just because you saw something in the road; well, Sue Rider!"

"What was it?" asked Bettie. "A note from the White Caps?"

"You can laugh," said Sue. "I wish the four of you had been along."

"For goodness' sake tell us what you saw," cried Miss Tarr.

"A note from the White Caps, of course," said Sue, scornfully, her round face growing ominously scarlet. "I thought this thing, the Boardwalk Committee, was in earnest."

"It is," said the post-office clerk.

"Of course it is," said Mary Harley.

"Don't be a goose, Sue, but tell us what you saw in the road," said the president.

"Tell us quickly, Sue, please," said the post-office clerk, "for Mary Ann Pickens is coming for her mail and she always rests for a quarter of an hour."

But Miss Rider was angry. She walked to one of the windows and stared out while Mary Ann Pickens came in, asked for her mail, got none and settled herself on the bench to take her quarter-of-an-hour rest.

Bettie Porter, Mary Harley and Elizabeth Tarr also resumed their seats.

From the post-office window Sue Rider looked out, seeing nothing within sight. Yellow taffy, the real Baltimore article, she saw, and a picnic in the woods and all sorts of delightful money-making things, pleasant temporary occupations for young ladies, and then she saw them fade away, as castles in the air, every one of them.

And she thought, hotly: "I would have worked like a Turk in its interests; if I burned my hands I wouldn't care."

Sue pressed her hands together nervously and looked down at them instead of out the window. They were soft and white, very pretty little hands, indeed, and she felt how good and noble

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it was of her to be willing to burn them, and, thinking thus, two tears welled up into her eyes.

Mary Ann Pickens had come and gone, mail-less at both entrance and exit and happy for all, the president of the Boardwalk Committee stole up to Sue and put her arm around her.

"Don't be a goose, Sue," she said, ever so softly, and then the hot round face with the eyes with the two tears in them felt on its cheek the president's gentle kiss.

"I think when we're formed into a committee we ought to be kind to one another," said Sue, not turning about; "I don't think we ought to make fun all the time."

That flighty creature, the post-office clerk, was about to say, "We are terribly ashamed of ourselves and humbly beg pardon," but she thought better of it and didn't, and Bettie's kiss and the silence that followed it brought Miss Rider back to a state of grace and graciousness.

"I was coming along the road," she said, facing about from the window, "up by Mrs. Porter's and Mr. Caulk's, when I saw him, old man Caulk, out in the road—measuring."

"Measuring!" echoed the other four members of the Boardwalk Committee.

"Yes, measuring," said Sue.

"What?" It was a terse whisper in four keys.

"He was beyond his own premises," said Sue, "and you all know as well as I do what he was measuring."

"Do you think it was the boardwalk?" asked Katharine.

Sue nodded gloomily.

"He has a comparatively new fence," said Mary Harley.

"He was beyond his fence," said Sue.

"Well!" said Elizabeth Tarr.

"Of course he'll ruin the whole thing," wailed Mary Harley. "Girls, we might have known in the beginning that it was senseless for us to form a Boardwalk Committee. We have lived through both the fracas of the Union Church and the fracas of the schoolhouse. Religion, educational advantages, everything goes down before that miserable interfering old man."

"Bettie Porter, what are you going to do?" demanded Uncle Sam's servant.

Bettie Porter walked to the post-office window and looked out, staring up the road as if she would like to see Stephen Caulk in the criminal act of measuring.

"You're the president," said Elizabeth Tarr. "Bettie Porter, what are you going to do?"

"He shan't measure it, that's all," said Bettie, indignantly. "Sue, did anybody else see him?"

"Your mother must have seen him," said Sue. "You can ask her about it when you go home. He was measuring and measuring."

"Well, he shan't measure the boardwalk, that's all," Bettie said again, with great courage and determination.

How was she to stop him? Nobody, not even the widow's daughter herself had the faintest idea; but a feeling of exquisite relief fell upon the Boardwalk Committee, all five of them, because of the energy of her decision.

"I'd write him a letter," said Mary Harley. "Bettie, I believe your mother could compose just the right sort of a letter, people all say she speaks so to the point. You get her to do it to-night."

But the president shook her head.

"That wouldn't be politic," she said. "We've just got to pretend we know nothing whatever about his measuring the boardwalk. Measuring the boardwalk indeed; our boardwalk; girls, did you ever hear of such a thing?"

They hadn't, of course, and it seemed almost incredible, but if Sue had seen him, and the widow had seen him —

"Bettie Porter," said Mary Harley, pressing her hand to her heart, "run home and ask your mother how long he kept it up."

"I wish he didn't live in Primrose," said Sue.

When the boardwalk of Primrose Hollow became a reality and a joy under the foot, would the old housekeeper in the red brick house with the bay window and the slate roof and the dumb fountain, still be "kind of sorry" for old man Caulk?

CHAPTER VII

EFFORTS FOR A VISIBLE BEGINNING

IF the contributions had been handed in for two or three weeks as liberally as they were handed in during the first week of the appearance of the witty and audacious notices, Primrose Hollow would have early gloried in a boardwalk free of debt and the Boardwalk Committee would have felt perfectly certain of the ability of five girls to accomplish great things with small trouble. The contributions, however, slackened at the end of a week, were spasmodically donated during the second week and threatened to cease altogether in the early portion of the third week.

The post-office clerk was very much discouraged. "If they," meaning the post-office patrons, "look at the list at all," she said, sadly, "they only laugh. I don't understand how men can be so mean."

The president of the Boardwalk Committee was not easily discouraged. "Katharine Dobson,

you must beg," she said, speaking with decision. "You are in a position to be the most useful member of the committee. You see everybody. Talk up the boardwalk vehemently. Don't cease begging because a man shows you his ungenerous side. Nag him ; keep on nagging him. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

The clerk's spirits did not revive immediately. "In my position," she said, more dolefully than sadly, "I hear what people are saying, and I know that the boardwalk has its enemies."

"Who?" demanded Bettie.

"I believe in my heart," returned Katharine, slowly, "that there are more people ready to oppose our plan than there are people to help us. There are others who laugh at the notices and the contribution list and declare positively that there will never be such a thing as a boardwalk in Primrose Hollow."

"They'll see," said the president.

"Such talk is very injurious." Miss Dobson sighed. "Here are we willing to work and to slave, if necessary ——"

"In the interest of the biggest improvement that the Hollow may ever expect to possess,"

interrupted the president of the Boardwalk Committee.

"Yes," said the clerk. "Why it's ever so much easier to give a little money. Poor as I am, it would be much easier for me to give a little money."

"Nothing of any consequence was ever accomplished without work," remarked the president, resignedly. "You try the begging system."

"Oh, I'll beg," said Katharine. "I tell you what," she added, her spirits suddenly rising, "I'll ask Mr. Peters to let us get the ties out of his woods and I'll ask a lot of colored men to cut them, and we can surely prevail upon some one to do the hauling. We need a beginning."

"A visible beginning," corrected Bettie. "A pile of logs here and there in the road. You are right. Ask Mr. Palmer to haul a load of ties."

The girl's gray eyes had sought the contributors' list and they dwelt upon the blotted scrawl, "Dave Palmer," the first defilement of the spotless sheet. Her brow puckered into a little frown as the writing above also penetrated her brain. "Five hundred feet of oak boards, 300 ties

and ten dollars' worth of hauling." She compressed her lips. Not while she was president of the Boardwalk Committee should Mr. Stephen Caulk be called upon for his liberal contribution. Of course he would gladly haul the ties from Mr. Peters' woods but after he had accomplished the hauling he would rub his hands together in self-congratulation and immediately constitute himself general manager of affairs. "I am sure," said the widow's daughter, "that Mr. Palmer will at least haul some of the ties. Anyway, you go ahead and beg."

The post-office clerk, following directions, did go ahead and beg; indeed, she begged so enthusiastically and persistently that by and by the patrons of the post-office began to murmur.

"Look here, Katharine," said the old postmaster, "what is this a-do about your plaguing folks for money? You are a servant of the public, child, and a servant of the public can't be too particular. It is a bounden duty of a servant of the public to try to please everybody."

"I'm not begging for the post-office, grandfather," said Katharine; "I'm begging for the boardwalk."

The old postmaster smiled. He was wonderfully fond of his granddaughter and he still thoroughly enjoyed the boardwalk notices, especially that line of it consisting of the two words, Katharine Dobson.

"Look here, little girl," he continued, "have you any idea of the cost of a boardwalk for Primrose Hollow?"

"It is only to be three feet wide," answered Katharine.

"It's to run through the whole of the town, I reckon." The aged postmaster spoke quite gravely. He didn't like to discourage anything, especially an improvement to Primrose, but a public servant must be careful and times were hard.

"Primrose Hollow isn't very large, grandfather," said Katharine easily.

"It spreads over a good deal of ground," remarked the old man, taking a pencil and notebook from his pocket. "Little girl, I'm going to make a rough calculation of the cost."

"We have forty dollars subscribed," said the clerk.

A young fellow, sitting cross-legged in the

gentlemen's waiting-room had asserted in the presence of witnesses that if the Boardwalk Committee would work out that arithmetical problem dealing with the gigantic undertaking, a boardwalk for the Hollow, in his opinion the members would immediately scare and scatter. The example certainly was a long one.

"There!" exclaimed Mr. Dobson, "that's the best I can do for you. You've got to raise two hundred dollars to pay for the boards, not the ties, mind you, nothing but the boards."

"Mr. Peters has half promised to donate the ties," said Katharine. She reached out her hand for the formidable example. "I'll show it to Bettie and the others," she said. "We hold a meeting to-night."

The girl's grandsire patted her affectionately upon the shoulder. "You've got a lot of nerve," he said. "If I was a girl that two hundred dollars would flounder me. But you show it to the others and if the five of you can't get what you want why just you bear in mind that Primrose is a mighty nice place in the summer time."

"It is dusty in the summer time," said the clerk.

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The old man put his hand under the girl's chin and tipped back her face. He was monstrously proud of her.

"But you mustn't plague the patrons any more, honey," he said. "It won't do. A public servant can't be over careful."

"Mr. Peters says we can get the ties out of his woods and seven colored men have promised to cut them for us," explained the post-office clerk that evening as she stood in the midst of the committee, "and that dear old Mr. Palmer says, 'Yes, indeedie,' he'll haul them, but grandfather has ordered me not to beg any more."

"Why not?" demanded the president.

"Because," answered the whilom beggar, "I am a servant of the public and it won't do. The post-office patrons are murmuring."

"Thank goodness I'm not a servant of the public!" cried Bettie. Then she laughed. "Oh, dear, am I a servant of the public or am I not?"

"We are all servants of the public until we build the boardwalk," answered Elizabeth Tarr.

"And we've got to be horribly affable through it all," said Sue Rider.

"If we only had to be affable," said Mary

Harley, "I've no doubt we could manage; but affability doesn't always bring in money as my father would tell you."

"I forgot!" cried the clerk, "grandfather did a sum to-day. I have it here. It's an estimate of the cost of the boardwalk."

The five heads bent together over that sheet torn from the postmaster's note-book, Katharine's finger pointing out the two hundred dollars.

"I'm not at all frightened," said the president. "I thought it would be more than that."

"Two hundred dollars is a good deal of money to raise in Primrose," said Miss Harley.

"In and about Primrose," corrected the president. "Suppose we write begging letters."

"To whom?" asked Sue Rider.

"To all the patrons of the post-office who haven't contributed to the fund."

The post-office clerk was foolish enough to skip over the floor.

"And we must write to Mr. Andrews," said Bettie.

Now Mr. Andrews, living in the town of Wainsborough, was the owner of the dark old

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warehouse in Primrose Hollow. This building, together with a dwelling-house and three acre lot, had come to him in payment of a debt and he held on to his estate in the tranquil hope that the Hollow would have a boom. He demanded high rent for warehouse and dwelling, consequently they were seldom occupied. True, the warehouse now and then appealed to the speculative eye of a business man and had in turn served as a milk factory and a machine shop. An ambitious barber then partitioned off a room in the south end, painted his door and a sign post and almost starved. Finally a venturesome tramp, longing for a home, crept into the second story, boarded off an apartment and made himself a bed. If it had not been for Jake Swift occupying that room in the second story, many and many a time would the inhabitants of Primrose have wished that a wind storm might bring down the old warehouse, for it certainly was a disgrace to a respectable little town.

"The boardwalk will improve Mr. Andrews' property very much indeed," continued the president. "Let's write to him at once."

Thereupon the Boardwalk Committee of Prim-

rose Hollow concocted the following satisfactory letter :

"John J. Andrews, Esq.,

"DEAR SIR: We are about to improve the streets of our village by a boardwalk. This walk will run directly in front of your warehouse and the adjoining lot, adding greatly to the value of the property. The walk will necessarily be expensive but as quite a number of property holders will be benefited we look for some generous contributions.

"Trusting that you will contribute liberally and hoping to hear from you at an early date, we are,

"Very truly yours,

"MARY HARLEY,

"SUSAN RIDER,

"KATHARINE DOBSON,

"ELIZABETH TARR,

"BETTIE PORTER,

"Boardwalk Committee."

"He can hardly get out of sending us something," said the president, folding the letter and putting it into a stamped envelope. "I know he's stingy, but if he's expecting a boom in Primrose he's got to help to make it."

"Of course he has," declared the clerk.

"I doubt very much if Mr. Andrews will view a probable boom in that light," said Miss Harley.

"But a boardwalk will boom Primrose Hollow," said Sue Rider, "even papa says so and he's always on the safe side of everything." Yet the display in Mr. Rider's bow window worried and disconcerted the soul of the merchant who worked on a cash principle.

A knock upon the office door startled the committee.

"I turned the key," said Katharine triumphantly.

"It's some one wanting to interfere," declared Sue Rider.

The some one, evidently listening, burst into a loud laugh.

"It's me," explained George Weever, the owner of the cash store. "I've just thought of something splendid. Let me in."

"This looks like a regular secret society," said Mr. Weever, stepping into the office and blinking in the brilliant lamplight, "a regular organized secret society."

"I thought you had something splendid to tell us," said Katharine.

"I have," responded the merchant. "You're going to carry this thing out, are you?"

"Yes," answered the committee in a single voice.

"Not going to become bankrupt? Sure you won't default?"

The speaker laughed afresh at the scornful expression in the five pairs of eyes.

"You're begging?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes, we're begging," answered the president.

"Well, what I've thought of is this." Mr. Weever's face grew grave, his voice was business-like. "You've got to have crossings as well as the walk. Why don't you ask the railroad to donate a carload of siftings? There's a great deal of hauling here to the station and the railroad ought to help. You write to Mr. Richard A. Wentworth and sign your names in full. He'll never have the cheek to refuse a carload of siftings to a committee composed of five ladies."

The Boardwalk Committee acted partly upon Mr. Weever's suggestion. The girls wrote for two carloads of siftings.

A comparatively small number of the begging

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letters sent out by the Boardwalk Committee received answers. Two of these answers were addressed to the committee, two were sent to the doctor's daughter, four to Sue Rider, one to Katharine Dobson and three to Bettie Porter.

"I have been more highly honored than any of you," said Sue.

"And I have been slighted," said Elizabeth Tarr.

"That's because you don't bow to people unless you know them," explained the post-office clerk. "But think of a public servant only getting one donation, especially after she's been begging for weeks!"

"The Primrose people act so foolishly," said the widow's daughter. "Of course there are exceptions, as those two sensible letters addressed to the committee prove. But the majority of our neighbors are determined not to regard the committee as a body; they're going to separate us and honor the individual."

"Or slight her," said Miss Tarr.

"In case they honor her she's expected to be horribly grateful," said Katharine. "Well, the public servant will only have to be grateful to

Mrs. Billy Kemp. Thank goodness she doesn't come to the office for her letters."

The Boardwalk Committee held a meeting almost every night at this period of its existence. Fifteen dollars had been added to the treasury and noted upon the contribution list. Things were moving slowly, to be sure, but still they were moving.

"Papa says," said Sue Rider, a red color suffusing her cheeks, "that he will build the boardwalk directly in front of our house and store. I think he would rather I wasn't a member of the committee, but mother doesn't care. Oh, I wish," she added, plaintively, "that men wouldn't fuss."

"Your father's heard, I suppose, that Mr. Weever suggested that we ask for the siftings," said the president.

Sue nodded.

"We'll have a piece of boardwalk for sure and certain," remarked Katharine. "May we put it on the list?"

"Papa never yet has gone back on his word," answered Sue. "If the rest of the boardwalk never comes into existence there'll be a strip laid in front of our house and store."

The eyes of the other four members blazed a little.

"Oh, we can manage with the rest," said the president.

"Now, you're angry with papa," cried Miss Rider, springing to her feet.

"Not at all," said Miss Tarr, coolly; "we are grateful to your papa."

"I think myself," continued Sue, "that it's a pity all the people in Primrose can't be friends, but there are certain things that a business man may find hard to forgive in another business man, let me tell you."

"It may be that Mr. Stephen Caulk contemplates laying the boardwalk in front of his property," said Mary Harley, serenely.

"For which purpose he is welcome to his five hundred feet of oak boards, his ties and his hauling," added Katharine.

"Papa wishes me to leave the Boardwalk Committee and I believe I'll do it," said Sue.

But the president's arm was thrown about the irate member. "We can't spare you, Sue," she said. "You're the most popular one of us. You received four donations in the mail. Besides

the girls in Primrose are going to be true friends."

"Let's impose a fine on any member who deserts the committee," suggested Mary Harley.

"A fine of two dollars," cried the post-office clerk.

This motion was unanimously agreed upon and the committee became amicable again.

"If Mr. Wentworth writes that we can have the siftings when we are ready for them we must put his donation in large letters on the list," said the clerk. "Won't it be awful if he says no?"

"Awful!" echoed the president.

But Mr. Wentworth did not say no. Mr. Williams, the station agent, waved a yellow paper at Bettie Porter one morning as she was passing on her way to the mail, at the same time vigorously calling her name.

"It's something for the Boardwalk Committee," he explained.

"The two carloads of siftings have been shipped to-day!" cried Bettie, rushing into the post-office. "Look at this."

"Isn't Mr. Wentworth kind," said Katharine, her face paling and reddening by turns, "and

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isn't it a good thing that we asked for two car-loads ? ”

“ To think of his sending them right away,” gasped the president. “ I thought that at first he would only half promise and that we'd have to nag him about it and be satisfied with one car-load. If only the Primrose people were as prompt and generous.”

“ John J. Andrews, Esq., never even answered our letter,” said the treasurer of the committee in a tone of deep disgust. “ Oh, the difference in men ! ”

CHAPTER VIII

A VISIBLE BEGINNING

BUT when the siftings arrived the Boardwalk Committee was thrown into a state of agitation. Mr. Williams declared that the cars must be emptied at once.

Who was to empty them?

"Mr. Williams is in a desperate hurry," said the president, her lips curling. "I don't see why those cars can't remain on the siding for a few days. We've got to have a little time."

The Boardwalk Committee, however, beguiled a half dozen men with shovels into working for the honor and glory of the Hollow and two days after their arrival the cars were empty and beside the track was a prominent pile of siftings.

The pile of siftings, worth thirty dollars twice over, freight charges included, was noted upon the contribution list and was spoken of in quite a brilliant little article in a Wainsborough paper.

The impressive pile of siftings was, indeed, a joy to the hearts of the committee, but, after all,

in conjunction with the piles of ties distributed at regular intervals along the Hollow roads, it constituted only a beginning. Something further must be done.

"Let us give an entertainment," suggested Bettie Porter.

"Or an oyster supper," said Katharine Dobson. "Everybody loves oysters."

"I move that we give both an entertainment and an oyster supper," said Mary Harley.

Elizabeth Tarr agreed that something, of course, must be done, but she did not see where an entertainment could be held in Primrose Hollow, nor where they could have an oyster supper which every one would attend.

"We've got to think of something else," said Sue Rider.

But Bettie solved the problem regarding the entertainment.

"We can use the old warehouse," she said. "John J. Andrews, Esquire, will have to donate the hall whether he wishes to do it or not. We'll not ask his permission."

"We had better not," said Mary Harley, "for he's mean enough to refuse."

"We are learning a great deal about human nature in the boardwalk connection," remarked Elizabeth Tarr, "but won't it be very cold in the warehouse?"

"We'll have a rousing fire," answered the president. She looked from the window of the post-office at the future hall and her gray eyes grew dark with the fun of it all. "I'll manage the entertainment," she said, cheerfully, "if some one else will see after the supper."

"The rest of us can manage the supper," remarked Miss Harley, "if some one whom the whole town loves will lend us a set of rooms."

"Oh, one of you will have to help me with the entertainment," said Bettie.

"I'll help," said Sue Rider. "I never catch cold."

A gloom settled upon the three members of the committee destined to attend to the oyster supper.

"Well, we've just got to look around and see what we can do," said the post-office clerk.

"If we'd have it at our house nobody would come," said Miss Tarr.

"Too many people died of diphtheria for us to have it at our house," said Miss Harley.

"A public servant cannot be too particular," said Katharine. "If we had the supper at our house some of the post-office patrons would declare that I gave my mind to business other than that of stamping the letters."

"Oh, something will turn up," said the president, easily.

Something did turn up. Miss Annie Taylor, hearing of the probability of an oyster supper in Primrose, sent word to the committee that she would be pleased to lend her room for the occasion.

It is needless to say that the committee joyfully accepted the dressmaker's offer.

"We'll use Miss Taylor's cooking stove, of course, and we'll borrow an oil stove," said Mary Harley, growing enthusiastic.

"We'll have oysters stewed and fried and broiled and raw," said Katharine.

"And charge extra for the coffee," said Elizabeth.

"Children will have to pay fifteen cents for admittance to the entertainment," said Sue Rider. "I don't believe in a ten-cent show."

"If everybody comes we'll make lots of

money," said the widow's daughter. "But the thing's got to be good."

"And the oysters have got to be good," declared Miss Tarr. "So often in these country places the oysters are not fit to eat."

"Oh, Primrose knows what good oysters are," said Sue Rider.

"The selects are very expensive," said Katharine.

"There is as much in the cooking as in the quality or rather the size of the oyster," remarked the doctor's daughter. "I'm willing to help to overlook the cooking."

"Sarah fries and broils oysters beautifully," said Miss Tarr, "but then, of course, we always get the selects."

"We've got to advertise both the entertainment and the supper," said Sue Rider, getting nimbly off the subject of selects, "and we've got to go around begging."

"Go around begging?" repeated Miss Tarr, faintly.

"Yes," said Miss Rider. "You didn't think we could have an oyster supper without begging for things?"

"I thought we bought the oysters," said Miss Tarr, proudly.

"So we do," said Katharine, also proudly. "We Primrose people always buy our oysters."

"But we beg for bread and butter and chickens and other meats and for pickles and jellies and whatever we can get," explained Miss Rider, glibly. "I love to beg."

"I would buy bread, butter and pickles," said Elizabeth. "I wouldn't have meats at an oyster supper."

"You'll change your mind, young lady, on the day of the oyster supper," said Katharine, "for some people like meats better than they do oysters. We must try to please everybody."

The Primrose people heard quiet talk of the oyster supper but they were startled when the announcement appeared. An entertainment and an oyster supper combined was more than they had looked for.

"The widow's daughter ain't going to give up her idea of a boardwalk for Primrose Hollow," said Dave Palmer, chuckling over the announcement. "I saw her on the bridge yesterday. She was calculating where she'd lay the ties, I reckon."

There's five young ladies on this here committee and one of them's been in the service of the public for more than a year, but for all that Miss Bettie's working in the front."

The widow's daughter was an object of universal interest in the neighborhood of Primrose. She had lived all her life in the long, lean house on the Hollow hill, she was an acknowledged belle at the county picnics and she wore Tom Gregory's ring upon her finger.

Tom Gregory was also an object of interest. He was a broad-shouldered, handsome young fellow who in a year's time would come into possession of a five hundred acre farm. He was hot-headed and stubborn, to be sure, like old Tom Gregory before him, but he had a big heart.

"Tom ain't put his name on that there list in the post-office, far's I can see," remarked a milk man, joining Mr. Palmer and also scrutinizing the notice in the gentlemen's waiting-room. "What's the meaning of that?"

"I don't know," returned Mr. Palmer, shaking his head seriously, "I don't know."

"The meaning is," said Jim Jackson, rising on the waiting-room bench and pushing back his

hat, "that Tom Gregory is of the opinion that it ain't girls' work for to build a boardwalk."

Mr. Palmer scratched his head. "They've got them piles of ties regular enough," he said, "and there's considerable donations on the paper. The railroad gave them the siftings, freight free. It kind of looks to me as if it was girls' work."

"Tom says them siftings is in the way of the teams," concluded Jim Jackson.

A girl, passing the station, heard the last words and was about to become indignant over them, but at the same moment some one touched her on the arm.

"Elizabeth has written the programs and they're beautiful, Bettie," gasped Sue Rider.

CHAPTER IX

PREPARATIONS IN THE OLD WAREHOUSE

BETTIE PORTER and Sue Rider tried the doors of the warehouse and found them locked. Inquiry proved that the man renting the dwelling-house was in possession of the keys. Peter Savage was a carpenter by trade and was only home at night. The committee held a consultation and called in a body upon the custodian of the keys.

Peter Savage was young and well mannered. Instead of delivering up the keys he accompanied the committee to the great dark building, cheerfully talking and swinging his lantern. The wind swept along the narrow lane leading from the dwelling house to the warehouse, whipping the skirts of the committee and tearing diligently at the five hats.

Although Peter Savage carried a bunch of keys, but one of the keys was serviceable. Three of the doors were evidently boarded up on the

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inside. "I ought to have known that," said the carpenter. "We've got to enter by the common way after all."

"I have lived in Primrose Hollow the whole of my life," said the president, "and I've never been inside the warehouse. Isn't it strange?"

"Well, you're getting there," said Peter, encouragingly.

Everybody was cold when the key was fitted to the lock of a small door opening on the lane.

"There we are!" cried the carpenter.

The door creaked ominously as it swung inward, but the five girls were in excellent spirits as they stepped up into a strange narrow hallway.

"I feel as if I were living in the Arabian Nights!" exclaimed the post-office clerk. "Isn't it delightful?"

"Delightful!" echoed Sue Rider.

Then the carpenter stepped up and closed the creaking door.

The lantern threw a fitful light over piles of refuse hay and over dingy wooden walls and over a great yawning doorway.

"That," explained Peter Savage, pointing to

the yawning doorway and speaking with an air of proprietorship, "is where the ice was kept when the warehouse was a milk factory."

"Oh," cried Katharine, in an ecstasy, "it's a dear little room."

"The door at the other end opens into Primrose Hall, as I reckon I've got to call it," continued Peter, not relinquishing his air of proprietorship.

"Is it locked?" asked the president.

"No," said Peter, "it's only got a nail or two in it."

The door in question yielded to vigorous treatment and this time the committee stepped down after insisting upon the carpenter going first with a lantern.

Primrose Hollow was considered by some people to be singularly quaint; in bluffer language it was called "old timed." The quaintness and old-timeness of the warehouse were fully realized by the Hollow's Boardwalk Committee standing in the centre of the large room. There were great beams across the blackened ceiling partially supported by ugly square pillars irregularly placed. The windows varied in size; some of

them were boarded up, through the broken panes of others the wind swept in and dead leaves and wisps of hay and pieces of old paper rattled and danced about on the uneven floor.

"It isn't as large as I supposed," said the president, "and the ceiling is fearfully low."

"It's cold," said Miss Tarr, shivering perceptibly.

"I wish the barber hadn't been allowed to partition off a room," complained Sue. "There's where the stage ought to be."

"Where will you put the stove, Bettie?" questioned Mary Harley.

"Well, now, young ladies," interrupted Peter Savage, gazing about him, "this here place is larger than it looks, I reckon. The stove's got to set in the middle of the floor and I see no reason why that barber's partition can't come down. I'll work on its removal at night and I'll fix you up a stage."

"Will you?" cried the committee in a voice.

The carpenter walked to the partition and thumped it with his fist.

"That'll be an easy job," he said.

"Will it be right of us to make alterations

without asking Mr. Andrews' permission?" inquired the daughter of the attorney.

"If we ask we won't get it, that's all," returned Katharine.

"There is no other place for us to hold the entertainment," said the president.

"I'll put the old feller's partition back again," said the obliging carpenter. "You see, I'm his renter."

"We will twine wreaths about the pillars," said Bettie, breathing freely again, "and build an evergreen frame for the stage. Trimmings will make a big difference in the appearance of things."

"We are ever so much obliged to you, Mr. Savage," said Sue, smiling graciously upon the renter.

"Yes, indeed," echoed the other members.

But when, in the course of a half hour, the girls were again out in the night Katharine Dobson demanded breathlessly, "How in the world are we ever going to thank the man?"

"Why, everybody ought to help," returned the doctor's daughter. "I'm sure Peter Savage will use the boardwalk."

"Yes, but he has already donated a dollar," said Elizabeth Tarr.

"If he does everything he has promised to do his work will be worth fully five dollars," declared Sue.

"I tell you what we'll do," said the president, "we'll let him lay the boardwalk."

Now it is true that Peter Savage was a good workman, but he had lived less than a year in the Hollow. Bettie's decision caused a stir.

"Jim Cole is perfectly sure of the job," announced Miss Rider. "He talks about it in the store all the time. He says that he can do the work in six days."

"Then Peter Savage can do it in four," said the president.

"Old Mr. Boon has drawn a plan which father considers excellent," said Mary. "Girls, do you know we are going to have trouble when our choice of a carpenter is made known."

"We won't make it known till we're ready for him," said the president. "Nobody ever accomplished anything yet without trouble."

"That's so," agreed the post-office clerk.

Peter Savage certainly did deserve the favor

of the Boardwalk Committee. He labored by the sweat of his brow tearing down the partition and erecting a stage; and when he had done all this the committee, invited in to inspect the work, gave a forlorn "Oh!" and the stage had to be torn down and reërected. In the beginning this important feature of the entertainment had its floor four feet above the floor of the warehouse and there was danger of the heads of the actors being lost to view behind the upper piece of the frame. Besides a pillar divided the stage into two parts.

"We can't ask people to pay a quarter if they're not to see the heads of the actors," said the president; "and we can't have the stage cut in two."

"Suppose I knock the pillar down," said the renter.

"That might be dangerous," said Bettie, thoughtfully. "That objectionable pillar is undoubtedly helping to keep the ceiling up. The stage will have to be put on one side, even if such an arrangement isn't artistic, and it must be lowered."

"I hardly believe the ceiling would come down

if I was to take away the pillar," remarked the committee's carpenter, "but I'll do whatever you wish. The stage'll look all right at the side and you'll get a larger dressing-room; for, ladies, you can't use the ice chamber, you'd freeze."

The Boardwalk Committee had agreed to borrow a stove; they had, indeed, talked of borrowing a stove immediately; but Peter tore down the stage as he had torn down the partition in the cold and went ahead with his work of reërection. The borrowing of a stove was, in fact, no easy matter. No member of the Boardwalk Committee possessed a useless or unused stove. The post-office clerk forgot her grandsire's orders and began worrying the patrons. Did any of them own a stove large enough to heat the warehouse, an old stove that they weren't using?

In the end Bettie's keen eyes discovered a desirable stove in the old station. She saw it through a broken place in the wooden shutter and her heart was glad.

"It is the very thing," she said to her friend at the post-office.

Although the knowledge of the existence of the old stove finished the search of the com-

mittee, although its nearness made it exceedingly available, although it was in every respect the "very thing," nevertheless conversation on the subject partially dissipated the pleasure of the committee. Why was it that the station agent had not offered the stove?

"He has known all along that we've been wanting a stove," said the president, "and he goes into the old office two or three times a week. Nobody could make me believe that every time Mr. Williams sees that stove he doesn't think of the Boardwalk Committee."

"He is mad about the siftings," explained the clerk, "furiously mad about the siftings. He thinks because I'm in the post-office I'm nearer to the pile, sort of overseeing it, I suppose, and he nags me wherever he sees me and sends all sorts of messages to the rest of you. I made up my mind that I wouldn't deliver his impudent messages. He knows well enough they're in as good a place as we can find until we're ready to put them on the crossings. Now he's threatening to attack you, Bettie Porter."

"Simply because the siftings occupy a little bit of the railroad land," said Bettie. "Consid-

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ering them to be a donation from the railroad I think they're decidedly in the right place. I'll shun the man, however, until we get possession of the stove; then he can come up to the house if he wants to."

"When are you going to ask him for the stove?" inquired Sue.

To this question on the part of her assistant, the head of the entertainment returned, "Oh, dear, I'm not going to ask him. I'm going to let Peter Savage do the asking. He can have the stove moved and everything. Girls," she added impressively, "Peter Savage is only a laboring man but he is treating the committee with the civility of a gentleman."

"He is," agreed the committee, emphatically.

The civil carpenter was friends with the station agent and upon this friendship he borrowed the stove. Furthermore he had it moved, put it up and made a fire in it. The committee went into the warehouse to view the fire and were filled with fresh gratitude.

About a few things the committee wondered:

There was a large box of soft coal sitting close

to the borrowed stove. Was the coal also borrowed? If so, from whom?

Wouldn't the fire have to be kept going previous to the night of the entertainment in order to heat the room properly? Who would keep it going?

Oughtn't Peter Savage to have a fire while he made the benches for the audience even if he had erected the stage and torn down the partition in the cold? The stove was hot as a furnace and the fire was roaring. Was soft coal expensive and how much would they have to buy?

Peter Savage answered all these questions. He had borrowed the coal from the station. Yes, since the fire was started it had better be kept going all the time. Soft coal cost next to nothing and the bill could be settled later on.

"I'll see to the fire," concluded Peter; "I know how to manage her."

"It's lucky for us that a man like Peter Savage is in possession of the warehouse keys," said Miss Tarr.

"He's so very thoughtful," said Mary Harley. "Did you notice that he'd boarded up those other windows that are broken?"

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"I wonder where he got the boards?" There was just a trace of anxiety in Elizabeth's voice, yet a minute before it had been calm and congratulatory.

"The boards are all right," answered the president. "I asked him about them yesterday, for, of course, we've got to keep a strict account of everything."

"Will we have to pay for the boards after the entertainment?" The treasurer wasn't pleased at the idea.

"No, indeed," said Bettie, cheerfully; "I'm not encouraging extravagance. The boards are a part of the old partition."

"He had to saw them, of course," said Sue; "but I don't suppose that will matter."

"Peter Savage has promised to return every board to its proper place. He says some of them will fit better by being cut. The barber was his own carpenter, you know." Bettie laughed and added, "My! but the partition has been useful!"

"We couldn't have got along without it," said the post-office clerk, "nor could we possibly have got along without Peter Savage."

"I think we may say that we can't get along without Peter Savage," said Sue. "Thank goodness he is going to keep up the fire. The place must be warm if we charge a quarter."

"The entertainment will be worth a quarter," said the widow's daughter, "and Peter Savage is to lay the boardwalk."

CHAPTER X

HUSTLING

PREPARING for the entertainment was no little work. Indeed the Widow Porter was of the opinion that her daughter, Bettie, was working too hard.

"Bettie is so very energetic," she said to a few of her neighbors; "I am sure she is giving more attention than is necessary to the arrangement of the tableaux. Country people don't expect much."

The neighbors, in turn, assented dubiously.

Of course the widow understood that the boardwalk would be a wonderful improvement to Primrose Hollow and a great convenience to Bettie, but she also said, to a few of her neighbors, that she thought Bettie was getting more than a fair share of the committee's work.

"If there ever is a boardwalk in the Hollow," concluded Mrs. Porter, "the people will certainly have Bettie to thank for it."

There was another individual in the town who

held a contrary opinion. The aged postmaster bragged persistently of the energy of Katharine.

"I believe," he said to the Primrose saddler, "that this boardwalk business will eventually be carried through. Yes, that little girl of mine who runs the post-office is determined to push it through."

"Miss Bettie is something of a hustler too," remarked the saddler.

"True," assented Mr. Dobson. "She's getting ready for some sort of entertainment, I hear. My granddaughter's got the oyster supper to look after. It's to be held across the way at the dressmaker's."

This news was stale news to the saddler. "I hope that there'll be a big attendance," he said, industriously plying his needle as he spoke. "A boardwalk ain't no small job. Expenses will pile up on the committee." He laughed out suddenly at the sight of three girls hurrying toward the post-office. "Maybe they ain't as much account as the widow's gal and your gal," he continued, "but they're powerful busy too. What do you think of the fire in the warehouse?"

The aged postmaster being a public servant was politic. "I don't know," he answered, "I don't know. My little girl hasn't anything to do with the entertainment; she's taken it upon herself to look after the oyster supper."

The head of the entertainment was also politic even if she did allow a fire to be kept roaring in the borrowed stove. She made judicious selections in her choice of subjects for tableaux and dialogues. Marian Windsor, for example, was a charming little girl, with a dear little face and a sweet little voice, but Marian Windsor had adoring aunts and uncles as well and no end of admiring cousins each and every one of whom would gladly pay a quarter to hear Marian recite her piece. No more than one individual was chosen from a family but every family in Primrose neighborhood must be connected by blood or friendship with an actor who would play a part on the old warehouse stage.

"Lizzie Brown has relations in every direction," said Bettie, jubilantly divulging her plans in the midst of the committee. "She's to be the morning star in the tableau 'Morning and Night.'"

"I should say she is widely related," exclaimed the post-office clerk; "she is even a distant cousin of Mr. Caulk."

"Mr. Caulk's quarter is all right," said Sue. "We'll welcome everybody to the entertainment."

"Mr. Caulk has been keeping very quiet, hasn't he?" remarked the daughter of the attorney, the surprise in her eyes growing. "I haven't heard of his expressing an opinion about anything."

"Not even about the siftings?" inquired Bettie.

"Yes, he has expressed an opinion," declared Sue. "He said in our store that he thought a boardwalk would be a great improvement to Primrose."

"He did!" exclaimed Mary Harley. "I've been expecting him to scratch his name off the contributors' list on account of our not consulting him. What did your father say, Sue?"

"Papa grunted," returned Sue. "Papa never does do anything but grunt when the boardwalk is mentioned."

"The Rock of Ages will be the loveliest of all

the tableaux," said Bettie, enthusiastically. "The cross is to be covered with laurel, and I'm going to ask Sarah Hobbs to be the girl. Now, don't tell me I ought to have a mature woman, I've set my heart on Sarah Hobbs."

"She is pretty," said Mary Harley.

"She's more than pretty," declared the president; "her face is sweet and sad, and she has such an enormous family and such a number of friends."

"We have quite decided upon fifteen cents admission fee for children of all ages and sizes," said Miss Rider, complacently.

Considerable excitement was attendant upon Bettie Porter's attempts to gain the attention of Sarah Hobbs. The girl, selected to be distinguished as the actor in the most beautiful of all the tableaux, passed through Primrose regularly five mornings every week on her way to the schoolhouse situated a mile and a half from the town, and she passed through again in the afternoons on her return from school, but alas and alack! she was a rapid walker. Twice Bettie sprang up from the breakfast table, at her mother's bidding, rushed frantically to the porch

of the long, lean house and cried at the top of her voice: "Sarah Hobbs! Sa-a-ra-ah Ho-o-bbs.

"She acts as if she were deaf," said the head of the entertainment, gazing dejectedly after the flying figure.

"You will have to go to her home," said the widow. Mrs. Porter complained of her daughter working too hard in the interest of the boardwalk, but nevertheless she did not like to see her plans frustrated, and if a dark day dawned for the committee, as some people prophesied, the president could count upon her mother's unfailing support.

"They have such awful dogs," said Bettie, "and it seems ridiculous that I cannot capture Sarah Hobbs upon the road."

"Have you yet succeeded in obtaining an interview with the girl for the Rock of Ages tableau and has Mr. Williams attacked you on the subject of the siftings?" inquired the post-office clerk one afternoon when Bettie called for her mail.

"No and yes," answered the widow's daughter. "Sarah Hobbs is fleet of foot and hard of hearing; I am now endeavoring to come face to face

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with her on the highway. Mr. Williams has been to see me about the siftings but fortunately I wasn't at home. Mother asked him if he had any message to leave and he said no, he'd see me later."

"He's going to see you now," said Katharine; "he's coming for his mail."

"Oh!" cried Bettie Porter. "Katharine Dobson," she added, "let me into your cage; hide me behind your scrap-basket; I'm not so awfully big and I can't attend to the siftings until the entertainment's off my mind; the people must get the worth of their quarters."

The station agent was undoubtedly surprised not to find the president of the committee in the post-office; he had followed her up with the full intention of doing his duty by the railroad.

"I was afraid I would giggle," said Katharine, after he had departed. "You'll be mighty smart if you succeed in escaping him until the entertainment is over. There's Sarah Hobbs now coming down the hill."

"Where?" cried the president, as if she didn't know the situation of the Hollow's two hills and which one Sarah Hobbs would descend

at four o'clock in the afternoon. "Can I catch her?"

"If you run," exclaimed the clerk, also excited.

Bettie ran out of the post-office into the road, thereby very much astonishing the station agent, who was standing on the depot platform engaged in weighing a coop of live poultry.

"If she'd turn her head I could wave to her," thought the president, forlornly. She waved anyhow but Sarah Hobbs did not turn her head.

Mr. Weever smiled broadly from the doorway of his store.

"Don't you give up, Miss Bettie," he said, encouragingly. "You'll catch her some time between this and Christmas. Say, why don't you write her a postal?"

"She never comes for the mail," answered Bettie.

A man who had been engaged in unhooking his horses at the end of the lengthy horse-rack, at this instant threw the reins into the clumsy old farm wagon and sprang nimbly to the board seat, cheerfully calling "Git up!"

When Paul Boon reached the scales he was arrested by a girl's voice.

"Are you going in that direction?" asked Bettie, pointing after the flying figure, all out of breath herself with overtaking the team.

"No," answered Boon, in great astonishment, "I'm goin' home."

"Oh!" said Bettie, "I wanted to overtake Sarah Hobbs."

Then Boon remembered his manners. "I can go that way if you want," he said. "Come, git in quick."

He leaned over the side of the wagon, reaching out his hands. Bettie Porter grasped the hands, put her foot upon a huge wheel and lightly jumped into the wagon. As soon as she was seated, the driver laid his whip in turn to each of the horses.

"Here we go!" he cried jovially.

"We are going to have an entertainment," explained Bettie, still a little breathless, "and Sarah Hobbs is to be in one of the tableaux; that's why I'm so anxious to catch her. You must be sure to come to the entertainment."

"You bet!" said Mr. Boon.



"HERE WE GO," HE CRIED JOVIALY.



"And bring your friends," added the president, politely.

"You bet," repeated Mr. Boon, "for I know it's going to be jolly."

"Miss Bettie's a rusher sure's I'm living!" exclaimed the proprietor of the cash store, his eyes fastened upon the rattling team. "I declare that's as good as a show."

A young fellow, riding down the hill in the wake of the girl who was walking so rapidly, saw in the distance that other girl spring into the wagon and seat herself beside the driver. It seemed to him that there was something very familiar about the girl and he stared hard. When the wagon passed him, the horses going at a break-neck speed, Tom Gregory recognized Bettie. His eyes, blazing wrathfully, met the merry eyes of the president of the Boardwalk Committee. Paul Boon was saying, "You bet, for I know it will be jolly," as Bettie bowed and smiled to him; but Tom Gregory kept his hat upon his head.

Mr. Weever waited outside his store to receive Tom.

"Did you see the whole of that?" he inquired,

with a burst of laughter. "It didn't take her a second to get into the wagon. Miss Bettie isn't going to give up a thing she's set her heart on. We're going to have a glorious entertainment in the Hollow. It doesn't make a bit of difference if we haven't got a regular hall, we've got an old empty warehouse and it'll do. After the entertainment the audience is expected to do further duty by patronizing the oyster supper. You've seen the notices, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Tom, "I've seen the notices in the county papers, in all of the stores, in all of the shops and on every prominent tree along the public road."

"They know how to advertise for sure and certain," said Mr. Weever, admiringly. "I say, we've got every reason in the world to be monstrously proud of the Primrose girls. Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Primrose girls, in my opinion," said Tom Gregory, sneeringly, "are making things pretty lively here in the Hollow."

He went into the store, banging the door behind him.

"Primrose girls," repeated Mr. Weever, "Prim-

rose girls, indeed ; much Tom Gregory's bothering his head about the other four on the committee."

The clumsy wagon had been turned about in the Primrose road several yards beyond the bridge, Bettie Porter had thanked Paul Boon for his kindness and had hailed Sarah Hobbs. The red in her cheeks came from the indignation surging within her at that intentional slight on the part of Tom Gregory, but she forgot her own personality as she opened the conversation with the girl.

"Yes," said Sarah Hobbs, "I reckon I can be it. I'd rather speak, of course."

"The cross is to be covered with laurel," explained the president. "You know you cling to the cross. All you have to do is to keep perfectly still while a stanza of the hymn, Rock of Ages, is sung. It will be the most beautiful tableau on the program."

"Yes, I reckon," said Miss Hobbs, "but I'd rather speak a piece." She had quite a pile of books under her arm. She looked down at them and pulled out her reader. "I can speak any of the pieces in here," she went on, "but my favor-

ite is 'The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck.' But some of the others are longer than that. I don't care how long a piece is; I'd like 'The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck' better if it was longer."

"But you agree to be in the tableau?" asked the president.

"Yes, I reckon," answered the girl; "but suppose you take the reader and look it over; I can read off somebody else's book."

Two horses clattered along the road drawing a clumsy farm wagon. The driver touched his whip to the horses in turn, calling out "Git up!" Bettie recognized neither the man nor the team, but her cheeks were aglow again with a recent experiment and mechanically she reached out her hand for Sarah's reader.

"Come to the rehearsal on Thursday evening at eight o'clock," she said. "Don't forget. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Sarah Hobbs.

"The idea of my accepting the reader," soliloquized the widow's daughter, looking down at the book and laughing tremulously, "but oh, it was miserable of him not to lift his hat."

CHAPTER XI

GOING THE ROUNDS

NOTWITHSTANDING the energetic manner in which Bettie Porter was getting ready for the entertainment, the post-office clerk was dilatory in begging for the supper.

"There is plenty of time," she said, "and I have to wait till grandfather is feeling well enough to keep office."

"It will take you fully two days to go the rounds," said Bettie, who, to save her life, could not help being interested in the oyster supper. "You have written about the oysters, of course?"

"Yes," said Katharine, "and I've decided that the second grade will be good enough. Do you believe the Tarrs always have selects?"

"No," answered Bettie, emphatically, "I don't."

"You talk about my going the rounds," said the clerk, returning to the subject of begging, "but there are certain places to which I cannot go. You know there are people who would

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gladly turn grandfather and me out of the post-office to-morrow if they possessed the power. There's only one person on the Boardwalk Committee who could go to every house in the Primrose neighborhood and that's you, Bettie Porter, the reason being that you and your mother have kept so much to yourselves."

"Well, I'll accompany you on one of your days, if you wish," said the widow's daughter, laughing, "and beard your lions while you hold the horse, for we've just got to go everywhere."

It may be that this offer hastened Katharine in the appointment of a day for the first begging expedition. Her grandfather's horse was fleet of foot and safe and she succeeded in borrowing the Primrose sewing machine agent's old buggy. The appointed day was Wednesday.

When Wednesday arrived, however, Bettie received the following note, brought to her by a passing mail carrier.

"DEAR BETTIE:

"I am awfully sorry but I can't go with you; grandfather is worse. You will have to get Mary Harley.

Very truly,

"KATHARINE DOBSON."

The widow's daughter was a little indignant over the wording of the note.

"Can't go with me," she said, "I thought I was going with her. I must get Mary Harley to go with me. So be it!"

"Yes, of course, I'll go," said Mary Harley, "if I may stay out in the buggy at some of the houses. I can't beg from people who haven't father for their doctor."

Bettie was going to ask "Why not?" but decided that it was wiser to be polite even with members of the committee. "You can stay out in the buggy whenever you wish," she said instead; "but do let's get off."

They were in jubilant spirits when they finally got off with the sewing machine agent's buggy and the postmaster's horse. The day was fair and cold. A brisk wind was blowing but it was at their backs. The sun shone warmly in their faces.

"We will be expeditious and businesslike," said Bettie. "I am sure we'll meet with success."

"People can hardly refuse things to eat for a boardwalk," said Mary Harley.

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"Hardly!" cried the widow's daughter, "and, I tell you what, we'll invite everybody to the entertainment. Mary, if you praise the entertainment I'll do all the begging. It wouldn't do for me to dilate on the tableaux and speeches when I'm managing the affair, but, really, the entertainment is going to be good."

"Of course it is," said Mary, "and I'll praise it up to the skies."

The girls were expeditious and businesslike and the majority of the people promised a basket donation readily enough.

"I thought I heered," said an enemy of the postmaster, "that this here oyster supper was being got up by the other party."

"The Boardwalk Committee is a single body," explained Bettie, in a conciliatory voice, trusting that she was speaking logically but not at all sure. "Mary Harley and I are members of the Boardwalk Committee. We are delegated to beg for the oyster supper and we're having excellent luck."

"Well," returned the enemy, gazing reflectively into Bettie's gray eyes, "I'll send the basket to your ma's. No donation for the Prim-

rose boardwalk or any other concern goes from this house to the post-office."

"I hope you'll send chickens, Mr. Wonder," said Mary Harley, meekly.

Now and then the doctor's daughter was a target for favor and three pans of rolls and half a dozen chickens were faithfully promised to be sent to the home of the Primrose physician.

"It almost seems as if the people imagine we are begging for ourselves," said Mary, jumping into the buggy after the sixth chicken had fallen to her share, "and, somehow, I don't like it."

"Shake the feeling off," said Bettie; "we are begging for the boardwalk and everybody ought to help."

The postmaster's fleet-footed horse was hauling the sewing machine agent's buggy blithely down a stony lane. Where the lane turned into the public road there was an abrupt descent. Bettie was holding the reins, as she afterward affirmed, when the buggy gave a sudden twist and dip into the public road accompanied by a loud report.

"Oh!" cried Mary, greatly agitated.

"I hope it wasn't a spring," said Bettie, anx-

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iously, "or, at least that the buggy won't break down till we get home."

"I hope it won't break down at all," said Mary, gravely.

The widow's daughter was nineteen years of age and a sensible looking girl, but it seemed to Mary Harley that she had a careless disregard of other people's property, for she actually laughed lightly.

"You see," said the head of the entertainment, apologizing for her laugh, "this old buggy has done full duty and everything must have an end. Mr. Selby isn't poor and he'll do a better business if the old buggy is never seen upon the road again. Your father is the person to be thankful. If the buggy had come down and we'd been injured, why he'd have to attend me free of charge, too, on account of the injury occurring while working in the interests of the Primrose public."

"If Mr. Selby sends in a bill for damages, what will we do?" asked Mary.

"Go to law," said the widow's daughter, with another laugh.

Now Bettie Porter had declared to the post-

office clerk that every house in the neighborhood must be visited by at least one member of the Boardwalk Committee begging for bread and et cetera, and, of course, she was going to practice what she preached; but as she turned the postmaster's horse into a certain gateway, the gate whereof stood invitingly open, a sensation exceedingly unpleasant came over her.

"Tom Gregory's aunts will give you a splendid basket, of course," said the doctor's daughter.

"I'm not begging for myself," returned Bettie. "I wish," she added, nervously, "that Mr. Dobson wasn't always getting sick. Katharine undertook the oyster supper and she ought to be doing the begging."

The girl's expressive eyes had fastened themselves upon the white farmhouse in a sort of fascination. When Tom Gregory reached the age of twenty-five the white farmhouse would be his. The two aunts would then move to the cottage and Tom was to bring his wife home. Such, at least, was the plan.

"It is a beautiful old place," remarked Mary Harley, "so very picturesque."

"We'll both go in," said Bettie, springing

to the ground and making for the horse's head.

"Of course," acquiesced Miss Harley.

"I'm a sight," cried the president, turning from the hitching post and gazing dejectedly at her skirt. "Look at me. Every time I've jumped out I've wiped the wheel. Gracious, I didn't know the wheel was so dirty. I was foolishly glorying in the sun."

"The wind is still blowing," said the doctor's daughter, "but the sun is very powerful." Mary's own skirt, however, was very presentable; evidently she had carefully avoided contact with the wheel.

Tom Gregory's Aunt Rachel opened the door; Miss Gregory met them in the sitting-room. They were advised to take chairs close to the stove.

"It's a blustering day," remarked Miss Rachel.

"The sun's warm," said Bettie, "and the roads are getting muddy." She could not help looking again at her skirt.

Miss Gregory also looked at the skirt. "It's a bad day for young ladies to be driving out," she remarked.

Mary Harley wondered when Bettie intended making known the reason of their visit. She sat there talking about such very unimportant things.

Not until Miss Rachel Gregory mentioned the boardwalk did the president of the committee pluck up courage to explain the presence of herself and friend.

"The Hollow has always been such a very quiet place," said Miss Gregory, and her voice told very plainly that she was opposed to the boardwalk.

"But we'll send a basket to the supper, sister," said Miss Rachel.

"Oh, yes, we'll send a basket to the supper," said Miss Gregory, "that is," she added, "if Tom has no objections."

Bettie started to her feet, explaining hurriedly that they had to go to ever so many places. "The Boardwalk Committee will be very much obliged if you send a basket, Miss Gregory," she said. "Come, Mary."

Miss Rachel accompanied the girls to the buggy.

"I will unhitch the horse," said Mary Harley, rushing to the horse's head.

"I was under the impression that you were to

give the entertainment, Bettie," said Miss Rachel, speaking in a low, kind voice, "and that the young lady at the post-office was to attend to the oyster supper. If I were you I wouldn't make myself too prominent, in a public way, I mean. I suppose that you and the young lady at the post-office have exchanged places and that she is to give the entertainment; I know it isn't true that the entertainment is to be held in the old warehouse."

"I'm to give the entertainment and it's to be held in the old warehouse, Miss Rachel," said Bettie.

Miss Rachel's face showed her confusion. "Oh, I'm sure it's all right, Bettie," she said, apologetically. "You see it's been a long time since sister and I were girls and things are different now, of course; only Tom ——"

"We'll be very happy if we succeed in getting a boardwalk for Primrose Hollow, Miss Rachel," said the girl, "very happy and very proud."

"Don't drive so furiously," expostulated Mary Harley, five minutes later, injudiciously catching at the reins. "Remember the buggy isn't safe. Oh, do take care, we'll topple over."

"Do let the reins alone," retorted Bettie. "The old horse thinks we want him to run away."

"I didn't know that the Gregorys were opposed to the boardwalk," continued Miss Harley, "nor that you and Tom had quarreled."

"We will go begging in the other direction tomorrow," said Betty, driving very calmly. "We certainly will succeed in collecting sufficient provisions for the supper."

Miss Harley did not consider it necessary to acquiesce. It was plain that Bettie was not going to make a confidante of her and she was, consequently, a little nettled. She knew, to be sure, that Tom Gregory had subscribed nothing to the boardwalk and that he was grumbling about the siftings. The attitude of Tom's aunts toward Tom's future wife had excited her curiosity. She had heard every word Miss Rachel had uttered while she so busily unhitched the postmaster's horse.

"If I had been you, Bettie Porter," she ventured again, "I wouldn't have gone there begging."

"I suppose you never heard that fools rush in

where angels fear to tread?" asked the widow's daughter.

She laughed as she put the question, laughed as Mary Harley said quickly, "Oh, yes, I've often heard that." She was very capable of answering any questions of a personal character that might be put to her by any girl in Primrose Hollow.

Mrs. Porter declared that evening in a positive manner that begging for the boardwalk was certainly not a healthy occupation, for Bettie had no appetite for her supper.

"I have been feeding on air," said the girl. "I had a splendid appetite for the air, mother dear."

"When you first talked of the boardwalk I hadn't any idea that it was going to prove such a tremendous undertaking," continued the widow. "I'm afraid you will catch your death before you are through; I'm afraid of the entertainment in that old warehouse. Bettie, are you sure you are running no risks?"

The head of the entertainment had only been half listening.

"Running risks, mother?" she repeated, the blood rushing into her pretty face. "How?"

Then the blood rushed away from the pretty face, leaving it singularly white.

Mrs. Porter regarded her daughter wonderingly. "Bettie, what is the matter?" she asked. She came close to the girl and put her arm about her. "Is it, is it Tom?" she asked, after a little pause.

It was easy enough to answer personal questions addressed by the girls of Primrose, but this was different.

"Mother," said the president hoarsely, "I love him with all my heart, and he isn't worth it."

CHAPTER XII

SNOW

THE sun was shining beautifully again on the following day and the mud in the roads about Primrose Hollow was probably an inch or two deeper. Bettie Porter was drawing on her driving gloves preparatory to starting out on a second begging expedition when the doctor's boy brought her a note.

"I am doomed to receive polite little letters of regrets and condolence," remarked the girl; "of course Mary Harley isn't going."

"Father says" (ran the note) "that it's too cold for me to accompany you. I am awfully sorry. Katharine Dobson says that she'd like you to come down to the post-office right away. Mr. Selby's buggy was badly broken. We might both have been killed."

"The sewing machine agent is furious about his buggy," began the post-office clerk when Bettie presented herself in the office. "How did you happen to break it? He says that the

boardwalk expenses are going to fall heavily upon him. And Mr. Weever came in here to tell me that Doctor Harley declared in the store that you are a terribly reckless driver and that you and Mary might both have been killed. Dr. Harley said something else, too."

"What?" demanded the president.

"That the boardwalk is all nonsense anyway; said it out in the store, and Mary on the committee."

"Which points to an alarming catastrophe," said the widow's daughter, dryly. "Mary won't be much longer on the committee."

"If she leaves she'll have to pay her two-dollar fine," said the clerk; "oh, don't I wish we'd made it five."

"To change the subject," said Bettie, "whose buggy am I to have this time and who is to go with me?"

"Mr. Weever says you can have his buggy if you'll drive carefully," returned Katharine, "and Sue Rider loves to beg."

"It won't do for both Sue and me to go begging for the oyster supper when the other party is getting it up," said the head of the entertain-

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ment. "The other party has got to be represented; besides, you know well enough Mr. Rider would never allow Sue to drive around the country in Mr. Weever's buggy."

"Elizabeth Tarr is sick," said the post-office clerk.

"Am I expected to go it alone?" asked Bettie. "Am I expected to be the Boardwalk Committee? Did you ask me to come down here in order to tell me that?"

"Grandfather will just have to keep the office," declared Katharine. "You wait till I run up to the house."

Half an hour later Katharine's grandfather, with his throat wrapped in red flannel, sat hugging the post-office stove.

"That little girl of mine has a lot of pluck and energy," he declared, between his coughs, "but this boardwalk business is considerably inconvenient to some folks."

Bettie and Katharine, however, hugely enjoyed the day. It added zest to the labor that the post-office clerk was so very frequently obliged to remain in the buggy, holding the horse.

"I love my enemies," said the flighty creature, "but my enemies don't love me."

"John Dines will be kept busy carrying the provisions from our house to the scene of action," declared Miss Porter. "I had no idea I was such a favorite."

"They think if they send the baskets to Miss Taylor's that I will receive them and be foolish enough to imagine myself forgiven," said the maligned post-office clerk. "I hope everybody won't send bread. Some people make such awful bread."

All the Primrose people and all the people in the Primrose neighborhood were again cordially invited to the entertainment and oyster supper in a taking paragraph in a Wainsborough newspaper.

"The Boardwalk Committee is finding out that there's a heap of talent in the Hollow district," said the father of Sarah Hobbs, after reading aloud that invitation in the Wainsborough newspaper. "I'd like our Freddie to say his Christmas piece to the audience in the old warehouse."

"Why don't you call it the hall, pa?" questioned Sarah.

Mr. Hobbs laughed appreciatively.

"Well," he said, "I never expected to live to hear the old warehouse called the hall. I seen it built. I've heard it called a milk factory and a barber's shop and the tramp man has turned it into an orphan asylum, but I never expected to live to hear it called a hall."

"You can laugh, pa," said Miss Sarah, "but it looks perfectly beautiful. There's trailing pine over everything, as natural as life; and there's a curtain run on rings before the stage, and Mr. Weever has offered to lend his organ."

"Who's done all the fixin'?" inquired Mr Hobbs.

"That girl on the hill and Rider's girl," answered Sarah. "Dr. Harley says that the warehouse ain't no fit place for to hold an entertainment. He's mad because Bettie Porter took Mary out riding in Mr. Selby's buggy and had a terrible accident with a spring breaking. The two of 'em come near being killed. He's the spitefulest man, Doctor Harley is, and he's talking right and left about the hall being damp and unhealthy. But he won't succeed in keeping the

Stony Valley folks away. Oh, my, but I'm glad there'll be sleighing!"

The sleighing was delightful on the day previous to that appointed for the entertainment and oyster supper, and the moon shone gloriously down upon the little town. Bettie Porter danced joyously over the parlor floor in the long, lean house. She was not going to make herself unhappy thinking of foolish things. She had undertaken the building of a boardwalk for Primrose Hollow, and when the boardwalk came into existence would be humble and ashamed. Everything pointed to success. The committee had advertised widely—in the county paper, in all the stores, in all the shops and on every prominent tree along the public road had appeared the entertainment's program, the oyster supper menu and a cheery "welcome to all." Sarah Hobbs had said at the last rehearsal that "everybody" was coming. Yes, the girl dancing gayly over the parlor floor in the house that needed painting realized that she was popular with the majority of the neighbors among whom she and her mother had lived so quietly.

Katharine Dobson was also in a flutter of

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pleasant anticipation. The oysters would arrive in the morning. Mary Harley, together with half a dozen older ladies of the Hollow, was going to overlook the cooking of the fries and broils and stews; the dressmaker was diligently clearing her rooms.

"Bettie Porter is going to have a little old woman invite the audience to walk over to the oyster supper," explained Katharine to her listening grandsire. "We will make lots and lots of money."

The other three members of the Boardwalk Committee were not rejoicing. Elizabeth Tarr was still sick in bed with a cold and fever; but Mary Harley and Sue Rider were in good health and soundly indignant.

"It will look very funny, father," said Mary Harley, tearfully, "if I can't go in to the first part of the entertainment. I am one of the committee."

"It is outrageous to hold an entertainment in such a place at this season of the year," declared the doctor.

"They have a fi-i-re," sobbed Mary.

"Yes, I know," said the Primrose physician,

waxing wrath. "Any minute there is danger of the old warehouse being burned to the ground. I understand that while the stove was borrowed the warehouse was taken possession of without leave or license. I will not have my daughter mixed up in this boardwalk business."

"Not mixed up in the boardwalk business, papa?" questioned Mary.

"I mean what I say," asserted Doctor Harley. "The whole neighborhood is astir. The family of a country doctor must be careful in their actions. Don't I cater right and left to these people? Am I to have my practice damaged by shop reports of my daughter breaking people's buggies, say?"

Mary, however, was not a girl to depart from the original subject.

"If I wear my coat and fur collarette, can't I go to the entertainment, father?" she pleaded.

"No," answered the doctor, "you cannot."

"Then," said Mary, in a voice as emphatic as her sire's, "I won't help with the oyster supper."

"Bettie Porter should be more careful when she borrows a buggy," said Mrs. Harley.

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"We might both have been ki-i-lled," said Mary, with a fresh burst of grief.

Sue Rider was not crying; in her own language, she was too filled with righteous indignation to cry. Sue's father had forbidden her to attend the oyster supper.

"The idea of a member of the Boardwalk Committee and a person who assists with the entertainment not going to the oyster supper!" exclaimed the indignant Miss Rider.

"Katharine Dobson oughtn't to have selected Mr. Weever for cashier," said the wife of the rival merchant. "I am sure your father has tried to do his duty by the boardwalk, Sue. But you can understand how if Mr. Weever is to act as business manager ——"

"Mr. Weever is not our business manager, mamma," said Sue, firmly; "but we have to have an honest man who can give change quickly."

Mr. Rider laughed ironically and departed for his store.

Katharine Dobson, considering that she was a public servant, moreover a public servant who in more than one instance had failed to satisfy the public, had, indeed, been singularly wanting in

policy. The truth is, attending to the affairs of Uncle Sam during business hours rushed her in the business of the oyster supper outside of business hours. She should have borrowed cups and saucers and plates and knives and forks and spoons and salt shakers and pepper shakers from all the stores in Primrose, not excepting the whitewashed provision store that leaned in a friendly manner against the old warehouse. But she didn't. In the hurry and flurry that was upon her she gladly accepted Mr. Weever's offer to lend all of these necessary articles and to have them carried in the broad light of day up the Hollow road to the dressmaker's.

"If I can't go to the oyster supper I have half a mind to have nothing whatever to do with the entertainment," said Sue Rider.

"I wouldn't do that," said her mother, quietly ; "it wouldn't be fair."

"Nothing's fair," said Sue. "Bettie Porter and Katharine Dobson are really the only active members of the committee. The rest of us ought to resign and send in our fines."

"What is the amount of the fine?" asked Mrs. Rider.

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“Two dollars,” answered Sue, “and I’m going to send mine in.”

“But not until you have helped Bettie with the entertainment?” said Mrs. Rider.

“If papa knew that we had engaged Mr. Weever’s organ he’d order me not to help with the entertainment,” said the righteously indignant member of the committee. “I don’t see how I’m to explain about the oyster supper. Oh, why can’t men be friends like girls.”

Early the next morning a letter was put into the post-office box. It contained two dollars, the amount of the fine to be handed over by any member of the Boardwalk Committee upon her desertion of the committee. The name of the sender was not Sue Rider, and the letter, owing to the negligence of the aged postmaster, remained in the box until the post-office clerk returned to duty.

It was a gloomy morning, but the baskets came pouring in. Their arrival kept up Katharine’s spirits, but her grandfather was in a state of nervous apprehension.

“It would be a terrible pity if we had falling weather,” he said.

It began to snow at noon. By four o'clock the snow lay two inches deep on the ground and was a beautiful thing to see on the pine trees in the postmaster's yard. A teamster, driving up from the station, met a girl on the hill. The girl was followed by John Dines who carried three chairs and a lot of stage drapery.

"Going to have the entertainment, Miss Bettie?" called out the teamster.

"Yes. Why not?" cried back the president of the Boardwalk Committee.

At the top of the hill the man turned in his saddle and surveyed the girl curiously as she walked briskly on her way. Then he clapped his hands together with a laugh, exclaiming, "Gee whiz! but it's turning cold!"

It was turning cold, beyond a doubt. Katharine Dobson joined Bettie in the warehouse.

"Do you think the people will come?" asked the clerk.

"They are still sending the baskets, aren't they?" asked Bettie in return.

"Yes," said the head of the oyster supper, "they are still sending the baskets."

"The oysters have arrived?"

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“Yes.”

“Well,” said the widow’s daughter, glancing toward the queer little square window, “snow is a thousand times better than rain.”

CHAPTER XIII

A BLIZZARD

THE wind began to howl about the old warehouse and all the air was full of swirling snow. Bettie stood alone before the coal fire, her hands clasped before her, her head drooping. The borrowed stove was red hot. It sent a glow all about it, glorifying the girl whose head was drooping.

Suddenly the door from the entry swung open. "Ain't the entertainment going to come off?" asked Sarah Hobbs.

"I don't know," answered Bettie, dubiously.

"They're fixing for the oyster supper," said the newcomer. She came close to the stove as she spoke. The snow melted on her shoulders and puddles of water formed themselves about her feet. Sarah Hobbs prudently wore her brother's rubber boots. "If all the tableau people don't get here," she remarked in a placid way, "why the ones that do will have to be

given extra turns. I know a whole lot of long pieces."

The president of the Boardwalk Committee, as previously stated, was not a person to be easily discouraged, but the idea of a few people scattered about in those gloomy benches and of Sarah Hobbs' lengthy recitations taking the place of carefully selected tableaux and dialogues was depressing to say the least. Ever so many people would be sorry if the storm prevented the entertainment, but there was one person who would be glad. The girl's thoughts wandered off through the snow, in at a blue painted gateway and on into the white farmhouse where this person sat in the chair of honor before the sitting-room fire. Tom Gregory had been spoiled from his childhood up and he had always been stubborn about unimportant things. There was no reason at all in his opposing the boardwalk.

"The boardwalk is not unimportant," thought the president in self-contradiction. Indeed, she realized as she stood there, not listening to Sarah Hobbs' fresh offer of assistance, that the boardwalk would be a very important thing. It would show the Primrose people what energy

and pluck and perseverance could accomplish. They had always given up so easily. It would prove to them the necessity of pluck and energy and perseverance. If these qualities had characterized those other movements the Hollow would not be minus its Union Church and its much needed schoolhouse.

Then the little door swung open again.

"Miss Bettie," said a small boy in a piping voice, "Miss Katharine says you'd better give up the entertainment and come over to help her with the oyster supper. She's getting ready for the people that comes out on the train, and Miss Mary Harley's stayed at home."

Bettie came face to face with Sue Rider in the entry.

"It's a shame!" cried the merchant's daughter. "Of course we can't have anything."

"Sarah Hobbs was the only actor courageous enough to battle with the elements," said the president; "but Katharine's going ahead with the supper. I'm on my way over. Come along."

"I can't," said Sue; "I've got to go home."

"I'll help," said Sarah. "Her pa's mad," she added, "because Weever's helping you all."

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The people who came out on the train did full justice to the oyster supper. The women who had reached the dressmaker's in the afternoon for the laudable purpose of helping, were liberal with their quarters and most of the men belonging to the Hollow put in an appearance. The night operator ordered a supper to be sent to him. True, Jim Little afterward grumbled about receiving a plate of fried oysters unaccompanied by either knife or fork, but that cold night he managed to enjoy himself, notwithstanding the omission.

Mr. Weever did a noble part by the oyster supper. He ordered all the store loafers to help the committee out and he purchased two suppers for himself and three for a half starved idiot boy destitute of a pocketbook and gloriously hungry.

Bettie Porter, however, was well able to act as cashier, but every now and then she counted the money in the cash box with a growing certainty that the expenses of the evening would be defrayed. That was well, for, certainly, the Boardwalk Committee could not afford to run into debt. But the cashier was sorry when Mr.

Stephen Caulk refused to accept change for his dollar. She told herself gloomily that in some way or other this old man and herself were sure to meet in argument before the laying of the boardwalk. It could not be otherwise. She failed to understand his quietness and suavity. He had encouraged the Primrose people in their desire for a Union Church and then had set an exorbitant price upon the lot of their choosing. In a similar manner had he frustrated the plan for a schoolhouse in the Hollow. An amount of money sufficient to pay for a church lot at an ordinary rate reposed in the Wainsborough bank and the schoolhouse fund had been turned over to the Primrose band to be used in the purchase of new uniforms.

It was eleven o'clock when Katharine Dobson came in from the kitchen to hold consultation with the cashier. Her face was flushed and she was much excited. Besides assisting in the cooking of the oysters, Miss Dobson had been making arrangements for the disposal of the superfluous oysters.

"Grandfather will take a gallon," she said. "There's no danger of their spoiling in this

weather. Don't you think your mother will want some?"

"You can save us half a gallon," answered the widow's daughter, promptly. "We'll send John Dines after them in the morning. Beyond a doubt we'll clear expenses."

"I am also going to ask the Primrose people to relieve us of the meats and rolls and biscuits," continued the post-office clerk, in a businesslike voice. "The jellies and pickles will keep, for, of course, we are going to have another oyster supper."

"Of course," echoed Bettie. Then she added, "I'm glad the bread is in the form of rolls and biscuits."

The majority of the guests had departed. Three ladies, who had helped with the supper, were lending willing ears to the dressmaker's entreaties that they remain all night. The aged postmaster was waiting for his energetic granddaughter to get ready to go home.

"I'll see you up the hill, Miss Bettie," he said politely.

The girl shook her head, declaring that she wasn't at all afraid.

"The snow's powerful deep," declared Mr. Dobson.

"You would have to return through it," answered the widow's daughter considerably, "whereas I'll only have the one way. Say, Katharine, I'll take some rolls and biscuits with me."

Bettie quitted the home of the dressmaker and trudged through the whiteness for several yards before she realized that she had never experienced as deep a snow. She bent forward as she ascended the hill. The fierce wind blew the hood from her head, but luckily it was fastened to her cloak. The wind loosened her hair. The huge bundle of rolls and biscuits that Katharine had given her prevented her from pulling the hood back into position, and her ears tingled as she pressed on. It was an awful night. It was wearisome work climbing the hill to the long, lean house. About an eighth of a mile further up the road a light shone out from a window. Bettie found herself giving thanks that her home was near. No, she could not possibly have reached that light. The gate to the widow's yard had been blown open in the early part of

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the storm, and the girl, in a dim way, was grateful for this. Suppose she couldn't have opened it; suppose she couldn't have called for help? The door of the sitting-room opened as the president stepped into the hall.

"My dear," cried the widow, "I have been so frightened. I am sure we are having a blizzard."

After that the president of the Boardwalk Committee dropped her bundle of rolls and biscuits upon the sitting-room table and sank into a chair, and then she was plunging her hands into the basin of cold water that her mother hastily fetched from the kitchen, and she was trying to laugh and trying to keep from crying at the same time.

"You will be ill, I know," said the widow. "My dear, my dear, you must get out of these wet clothes."

Bettie Porter, however, did not catch cold from her exposure on that night of the blizzard, for a blizzard it was with a vengeance. It was impossible to live in Primrose during a blizzard and not to suffer. No fire was warm enough to heat the wooden houses. But the inhabitants of the Hollow will long remember the blizzard on ac-

count of the biscuits and rolls that had been donated to the oyster supper. Biscuits and rolls are palatable food when fresh, but they become stale very soon. The Primrose people were prudent. No one in the town baked bread during those four days of desperate weather; they partook of stale biscuits and stale rolls and heartily wished that they might never look upon the like again. It was the first time that Primrose had been visited by a blizzard and it was the first time that the inhabitants had existed on other people's bread.

But even while eating a stale roll, the aged postmaster of the Hollow possessed a grateful heart. He was thankful that Bettie Porter had reached her mother's home in safety. He had secretly visited the outside world in the hopes of finding things "not too bad" before he had offered to see the girl up the hill. He had felt relieved and grateful when she refused his offer. But he didn't sleep well after toiling home with Katharine. "Yes," he said again and again, "I am exceedingly thankful that nothing happened to the widow's daughter on that awful night."

There was another truly grateful soul in Prim-

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rose. The tramp in the old warehouse had been kept from freezing by the warmth from the stove pipe belonging to the borrowed stove.

There was considerable murmuring in the Primrose neighborhood after the blizzard. People wanted to know what the Boardwalk Committee had done with the donations. Report stated that the inhabitants of the Hollow had eaten the donations. Was this true or wasn't it? Then, too, while the baskets had been returned with thanks to their owners, the committee had woefully confounded the plates. The post-office clerk led a wretched existence among the people's plates, for almost every patron of the office handed her a plate with the information that his wife said it wasn't hers.

"The women will have to claim their own property," said Katharine; "I've done the best I could. Dear me, I don't believe they know what belongs to them, for I was awfully particular."

The four remaining members of the committee met over that letter of resignation sent in by Mary Harley and opened by the secretary, in obedience to a rule recently established; they

had met as soon as the roads were passable, in the home of Elizabeth Tarr, who was still far from well. The president and the post-office clerk were inclined to be scornful over the letter of resignation, but finally decided that Mary was not to blame.

"Nothing is going right," said the sick girl. "We have undertaken more than we can accomplish. Even Providence seems to be against us."

"We cleared expenses at an oyster supper on the night of a blizzard," said Katharine. "I think that was doing pretty well."

"Clearing expenses doesn't give any money toward the building of the boardwalk," said Miss Tarr.

"Elizabeth is right," declared Sue Rider. "The Primrose people are never going to work in unison, anyway."

"You mean," said the president, slowly, "that the Boardwalk Committee is not going to work in unison."

"Oh, if we could accomplish anything I'd say go ahead," said Sue.

"So would I," said the sick girl, warmly.

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"We will accomplish something," declared the president.

"Mary Harley's fine gives us two more dollars in the treasury," said the post-office clerk, determined to look upon the bright side of a thing.

"The doctor's afraid he will lose Mr. Selby's patronage. I believe if public servants wouldn't cater so assiduously to the public that the public would more highly esteem them."

"You cater and your grandfather caters," said Miss Rider.

"I know we do," said Katharine, "but I'm chafing."

"It is my opinion," said Bettie, the next time she and Katharine were alone, "that we are going to lose two more members of the Boardwalk Committee."

"Well, that means four more dollars in the treasury," returned the clerk.

"Let them go," continued the president, with a wave of her hands. "You and I can show the world that the committee hasn't dissolved."

"And there will still be a head for the entertainment and a head for the oyster supper," said Katharine.

That anger against the Boardwalk Committee and against the special inhabitants of the Hollow was appeased throughout the neighborhood when a second announcement appeared giving a fresh date for the entertainment and oyster supper. No one quite understood how the rolls and biscuits and cakes had been preserved for a period of two weeks, but as the committee had refrained from further begging, of course, there was food on hand.

"That there Boardwalk Committee is bound for to stick to its word," remarked Dave Palmer. "It gives out that there's going to be a show and a supper and a show and a supper it's determined to have. I reckon they dumped the victuals down in the snow."

"I heered," said a man in Weever's Cash Store, "that the committee was dissolved."

The loafers about the store were perplexed. The inhabitants of Primrose, according to gossip, had eaten the donations yet the oyster supper was being widely advertised. Dissolved committees were not in the habit of giving shows and festivals.

"Everything is going on all right," said Mr.

Weever, complacently. "I'm of the opinion that there'll be a Boardwalk Committee in the Hollow until there's a boardwalk."

Miss Rachel Gregory was worried.

"I don't see," she said, "how the Primrose girls are going to manage about the supper. I don't believe the salads or tarts or anything will be in good condition."

"The Primrose girls are not bothering about the good condition of the salads and tarts," returned Tom. "All they're after is the people's money."

"They are honest, Tom," said Miss Rachel, gently. "You know that the Primrose girls are honest."

"I know they paid a tremendous price for their oysters," said Tom; "and they didn't get a first-class article, either, and that they came out."

Miss Rachel had heard that the oysters served on the night of the blizzard were excellent, but she was not good at an argument.

"I hope it will be a clear evening on the 10th and that there will be a good attendance," she concluded cheerfully.

The Boardwalk Committee, reduced to two

members, at this very moment met in consultation on the oyster question. A rumor was afloat that the committee had purchased oysters in wholesale quantity and paid a retail price for them. The girls decided before they parted to ask Mr. Weever to buy the oysters.

When Mr. Rider learned that Mr. Weever had been intrusted with the buying of the oysters for the Boardwalk Committee, he quarreled with his wife for feeding him on stale rolls and biscuits during the blizzard, ordered his small boy to keep away from the warehouse and the dressmaker's establishment and thanked his stars that Sue had at last sent in her resignation and her fine.

Bettie and Katharine, planning for the supper, determined to have several freezers of ice cream.

"We will buy the cream and freeze it ourselves," cried the post-office clerk, rapturously. "There is such a tremendous profit on home-made ice cream and everybody loves it."

It was in the interest of the ice cream that Bettie Porter started out one morning to walk to the first farmhouse beyond the Hollow. Mr. Smith kept a number of cows and fortunately

wasn't in the milk business. He would be able to furnish cream to the committee.

As the girl descended the hill she saw before her a familiar figure on horseback; it was Tom Gregory on his way from the station.

The horseman turned aside from the public road into a field road made during the blizzard. He was undoubtedly a careful man. The public road was slushy in the hollow; one might possibly sink half a foot in the slush. Bettie looked down at her new rubber boots, the widow's Christmas gift, and walked on rapidly. She knew that Tom had turned his head and that his eyes were upon her as she placed her right foot on a great clump of frozen snow that wobbled ominously. The next instant she slipped, fell back in a sitting posture, cried out "Oh!" forlornly and felt the slush closing about her skirts.

"Don't!" yelled Tom, when she attempted to struggle out of her dilemma, and the "Don't!" was imperative and authoritative. "Wait till I get to you."

He got to her as soon as he could and stood a foot deep in the slush, holding out his hands.

Bettie's hands were encased in a huge pair of

fur gloves that she had borrowed from the postmaster. One of the gloves fell into the slush as she held up her hands. The ungloved hand was small and soft and upon a finger of it was a ring. Tom's face grew hot as he looked at the ring.

"Step this way," he ordered, curtly.

Bettie obeyed.

"Now go home and get rid of those wet skirts."

There was nothing else to be done, but her face was as hot as Tom's and she did not say "thank you."

The young farmer galloped his horse the rest of the way home and hurried it into its stall; then he went to the house and searched in vain for writing paper, pen and ink. His Aunt Rachel finally supplied him with these articles.

Miss Rachel watched her nephew anxiously. Twice he wrote a letter and tore it into bits, but the third letter he folded and put into an envelope.

"Tom," said his aunt, half timidly, "you're not angry with any one?"

"No," said Tom, shortly, but he was handling his letter nervously.

Miss Rachel Gregory had lived in the world

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for over fifty years and she understood thoroughly how a young man or a young woman might recklessly throw away happiness.

"Tom," she asked, "is that letter to Bettie?"

"I never in my life," cried Tom, putting the letter into his pocket as he spoke, "heard of anything so utterly foolish as this boardwalk business. Who's going to an entertainment or an oyster supper with the roads in such miserable condition?"

"Oh, I hope people will go," said Miss Rachel.

"She was in slush to her knees," said Tom, the frown on his forehead deepening.

"In the slush to her knees—Oh, Tom!" cried his aunt. "Where did you see Bettie Porter in the slush to her knees?"

But Tom jerked up his cap and went out without answering.

CHAPTER XIV

A LETTER

"SISTER," said Miss Rachel Gregory, after searching the house for Miss Gregory and finding her in the garret carefully overlooking a trunk full of treasures. Any day on which the sun shone through the garret windows of the farmhouse Miss Gregory might be found in the garret deep in the mysteries of one or other of the trunks carefully stowed away. It was rather to be wondered at that Miss Rachel should have looked everywhere else first, even descending the dangerous cellar steps, but then Miss Rachel was disturbed as her face plainly showed.

"Well?" inquired Miss Gregory, as for a minute she desisted in the operation of smoothing out an ancient gown.

"Tom has written a letter," said Miss Rachel, folding and unfolding her hands nervously, "and I think he is going to send it."

The act of examining ancient gowns that were

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no doubt family heirlooms, ought to have put Miss Gregory into a sentimental state of mind, but, evidently, it hadn't. She looked at Miss Rachel in surprise, not understanding why Tom shouldn't write a letter and doubtlessly thinking that after the trouble of writing a letter it would be remarkably silly in Tom not to send it.

"I am sure it's to Bettie Porter," said Miss Rachel, "and Tom is in a temper."

A flush came into Miss Gregory's cheeks and she rose stiffly from her knees by the trunk. "Girls at the present day are flighty creatures, taking them all in all," she said. "So you think Tom has broken the engagement?"

"Oh, I don't say that!" answered Miss Rachel, her face growing red all over and then beginning to pale; "I hardly think Tom would break such a sacred thing as an engagement for such a very ——"

"Unsacred thing as a boardwalk," snapped Miss Gregory. "But if he makes Miss Porter mad *she* may break it."

"I trust Bettie has too much sense," said Miss Rachel. "Where will she find a better young man than Tom? Of course I know he has a

temper and flares up easily ; but the people of Primrose are such terrible talkers there's no telling what all he's been hearing. Sister, you do not really think that Bettie would be foolish enough to give up Tom ? ”

“ She is foolish enough to be glad that she broke a young man's buggy,” said Miss Gregory, severely, while her eyes grew steely ; “ she is flip-pant enough to give it out around Primrose that if she and Miss Harley had been injured in any way when they broke the buggy—smashed it beyond repair, I understand, and actually laughed—that Dr. Harley would have been obliged to attend her free of charge, even giving her the medicines, because she was working in the interests of the public good. And the widow allows this thing to go on ! No person living, Rachel, wishes the boy to be happy more than I, not even you with all your sentimentality ; but you know and I know what our mother would have thought of either of us if we had dared to act as Bettie Porter is acting.”

“ Times have changed,” said Miss Rachel, “ and the Primrose people are the greatest gossips in the world.”

"Where there's fire there's smoke," said Miss Gregory. "Surely, Rachel, you believe that the buggy was broken? It belonged to that Mr. Selby, didn't it? And don't you believe that Bettie Porter said she was glad?"

"It was such a dilapidated old buggy," said Miss Rachel. "A man ought to be punished who would lend a buggy in that dangerous condition to two young girls to ——"

"Go on," said Miss Gregory, "to two young girls to drive like mad around the neighborhood in the service of a public good. Bosh! I don't blame Tom for anything that he wrote in his letter. If he told her that he wouldn't marry her, I don't blame him."

"Told her he wouldn't marry her! That would be ungentlemanly, it would be hard and cruel," said Miss Rachel, wringing her hands. "Tom has a temper; maybe he can't help it; I reckon it's an inheritance; but there never yet was a Gregory, to my knowledge, who wasn't in his heart at least a gentleman."

"One can't be too particular about a marriage," said Miss Gregory. The dress she had been smoothing was the wedding dress of her grand-

mother, a little lady whose portrait in oils hung in the dim parlor below stairs. The scent of the lavender rose to her nostrils and in a dim way she remembered the old story of Margaret Gregory being a sweet woman who had suffered and grown strong with her Gregory husband and her Gregory sons. "Yes, they were all gentlemen in their hearts," she murmured, "if some of them were a little hard-headed."

"If he doesn't marry her, he's just the kind to go and marry somebody else in a hurry and repent it all the rest of his life," said Miss Rachel, her eyes growing big and frightened. "Sister, it'll be different for us if he marries somebody in a hurry like that instead of marrying Bettie Porter."

"Why doesn't she keep quiet then?" demanded Miss Gregory. "Why doesn't she stay home with her mother and behave herself like a lady? She saw that day she was here that we weren't pleased to have her go around begging. She knows we hear everything that she says and does over there in Primrose and that Tom doesn't like it at all. Why should she, systematically, as it were, go ahead making enemies of Tom's peo-

ple, let alone Tom himself, one of the best young men in the world, if I do say it."

"Of course Tom is one of the best young men in the world," said Miss Rachel, "but Bettie Porter has not made an enemy of *me*, sister."

"You heard of the cake?" continued Miss Gregory, her voice trembling in an agitation of anger; "you know that she declared her intention of carrying a cake, a pound cake or a sponge or perhaps a jelly cake, through the town of Primrose, all by herself, and getting chances on it and raffling it, probably in one of the stores. Rachel Gregory, if a year ago you had been asked to pick out a wife for our Tom, would you have selected a girl who intended carrying a cake through the Hollow streets, begging chances at every door; a girl who proclaimed the fact that she would shame the people into taking chances on the cake?"

"I am sure," said Miss Rachel, "that there is some mistake about the cake. Certainly she hasn't carried it through the town."

"No, she hasn't yet," went on Miss Gregory; "she is going to wait. The boardwalk will need money in the summer as well as now. Miss Bet-

tie Porter, our Tom's future wife, intends to wait for the summer. She is in hopes that there will be summer boarders in or about Primrose Hollow—maybe she's got some of the people to promise to get them for her, I don't know—but I do know, and you know too, that Bettie Porter says, if necessary, she will carry her cake through the town and that if there are any summer boarders she will make them hungry for it, so as to fill her chance book. Nobody else in Primrose would ever have thought of such an expression as that. If Tom has gone and told her in his letter that he won't marry her, I declare to goodness I'm on the boy's side; I haven't patience enough to cope with Miss Bettie Porter."

"Do you think the boy would ever be happy with anybody else?" asked Miss Rachel.

Miss Gregory, without answering except by a "Hump!" went down on her knees and her head bowed over the old trunk. In her nostrils again was the scent of the lavender coming up from the wedding garment of the little woman who had suffered and been strong for the sake of a Gregory husband and four Gregory sons, William and Stephen and Frederick and Tom.

"Do you think," persisted Miss Rachel, "that he could stand driving past the widow's gate with somebody else in the buggy while Bettie was back there with her mother? I tell you, sister, I know Tom well enough to understand just how utterly miserable he would feel."

Perhaps Miss Gregory did too, although she continued in silence to press down that scented wedding garment. Would the girl in the buggy with Tom satisfy him while Bettie Porter was back there in the old unpainted house with her mother? Would the girl beside him be the kind of young person to grow strong and to suffer because of a Gregory man? But Tom wasn't the sort of a man to make a woman suffer; there would be no need for his wife to grow strong. But people changed. Bettie Porter had certainly changed within the last few months, and Tom might also change. Although her heart was not as tender as that of Miss Rachel, she found herself pitying the young wife who rode with Tom along the road past the widow's long, lean house, found herself pitying the husband of the girl who wasn't Bettie Porter and in an undefinable way found herself actually pitying that foolish Bettie

Porter for having lost Tom and the farm and all.

"The widow ought to be ashamed of herself," she cried indignantly. "When you and I were young, Rachel, what would folks have thought of our mother if she had let us start out and do the things that Bettie Porter is doing? They would have thought she was raving mad. Yet over there in Primrose Hollow I believe the widow passes for sane."

It was no use for Miss Rachel to say again that times had changed. She said instead, "Sister, it's cold up here in the garret, you'd best come down," and she turned away and went downstairs herself and into the sitting-room and took up her knitting. She dropped several stitches and had a great time getting them back on the needles and she rocked herself to and fro with the sun in her eyes.

The tears as well as the sun were in Miss Rachel's eyes as she thought of the girl that Tom Gregory might choose for a wife if he and Bettie let go the sacred bond between them. She might be a gay young creature who would give little thought to the two old aunts in the

cottage. "But I don't want her to come near me," said Miss Rachel, and gave a vigorous rub of her hand over her eyes; "she can stay away forever. I don't know anyway if Sister and I would care much about the cottage and living so near as that. I'm thinking I'd be in for leaving the Primrose neighborhood and going off to some place I've never been. And he won't be as good a man, Tom won't, if he ever does a thing like that. She would have run down to see us almost every day, Bettie would, as soon as she got over her shyness toward Sister; and once let Sister get sick or something, nobody in the world would appreciate Bettie more than she, not even Tom, though he always has seemed to know what's the right sort and what isn't. But make a young fellow mad and there isn't any telling where he'll stop. I wish the Hollow folks were just determined to stick in the mud and would put their feet rough-shod on improvements, this very day. No, I don't either; I wish we were all up to date and that she'd build her walk and people would praise her for it — There! I don't care if I am an old maid and was raised with old-time notions, Bettie Porter has the truest eyes in the whole

United States, as far as I can see, and the widow is a good woman if she is kind of foolish."

But Tom had written a letter and had gone out carrying it. Tom, angry, could say awful things. An angry man, who can say awful things, can write awful things. Awful things that are said are more easily forgotten than awful things that are written.

Miss Rachel knitted furiously and dropped stitches without noticing them, while Miss Gregory remained up in the garret, catching cold, of course, for even on a sunshiny day an elderly lady cannot remain overlong in a chilly atmosphere, and the sunshine does not take the place of a stove except in spots, and Miss Gregory, after her sister had left her, had changed her position and was working diligently at a trunk in the shadow.

CHAPTER XV

MORE TROUBLES

MR. RIDER'S disobedient son brought Bettie her letter that night as she was holding a rehearsal in the warehouse. The girl read it by the light of Peter Savage's lantern, her face flushing and paling by turns. It was a long letter. The time might come when she would regard it as altogether a foolish letter. The whole day Tom Gregory's voice had been ringing in her ears, crying out, "Don't! Wait till I reach you!" and "Now go home and get rid of your wet skirts." It had seemed to her that he had a right to say these things to her in a dictatorial way, for she should not have attempted to cross that slushy place in the hollow. But he had no right to say the things he was saying in this letter. The man's fingers had destroyed the two letters in the morning and the girl's fingers destroyed the third. Bettie's lips were pressed firmly together and her eyes were brilliant as she crossed the



SHE WAS WATCHING THE BLUE FLAMES GREEDILY LICKING UP
THE BITS OF PAPER.

warehouse floor and threw the bits of paper into the borrowed stove.

"All the folks from Stony Valley are coming to see me in the Rock of Ages," explained Sarah Hobbs, in a drawling voice.

"Yes," said Bettie, mechanically, "yes," but she was watching the blue flames greedily licking up the bits of paper.

The head of the entertainment was obliged to be busy at a rehearsal. Something was wrong with the curtain; it wouldn't pull properly. Patience, time and common sense were necessary to get it into acting order. Sarah Hobbs had forgotten a part of her costume and Mr. Rider's disobedient but accommodating boy was dispatched with a note to the widow begging her to look into a certain bureau drawer and duplicate the missing garment. The music sounded all wrong with the organ at the foot of the stage, consequently the organ had to be moved to the side of the stage instead. Bettie Porter was here, there and everywhere.

At last the president paused in her labors. Was she through? No, there was something else she had to do, something closely connected

with the building of the boardwalk. She wandered off to the carpenter's lantern and stood for an instant gazing stupidly at the ring on her finger. Then she removed the ring, dropped it into the pocket of her dress and felt miserably homesick for her mother's arms.

It was astonishing how many people succeeded in getting to the entertainment, for the roads were certainly in a wretched condition. The seats filled up at an early hour, the audience not belonging to that class of ennuied individuals who come late to a show. A Primrose man or woman who paid a quarter wanted the full worth of the quarter, a Primrose girl or boy who paid fifteen cents wanted the worth of the fifteen cents. The waiting audience talked of the almost impassable roads and the best way of managing a horse, but the conversation was merrily pleasant.

"Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee."

The words of the hymn were sung softly and sweetly, the girl's beautiful uplifted face, her clinging hands filled the audience in the old

warehouse with a sort of wholesome awe. Then it was that every man, woman and child felt satisfied about spending the quarters and fifteen cents. The dialogues before and after Sarah Hobbs' tableau were highly appreciated and the three little children smiling openly from the shelter of a wheat shock brought joy to the soul of every farmer on the premises. Betty was busy in the dressing-room when a messenger came to her.

"Miss Bettie," said the messenger, breathlessly, "Miss Katharine wants to know what she's to do. The oysters haven't come."

"The oysters haven't come!" cried Bettie, aghast. "Why, what's happened to them?"

"Nobody knows what's happened to them," answered the boy. "Mr. Weever says it's all right; they'll be here on the late train. Miss Katharine wants to know if she ought to telegraph to Wainsborough and order five gallons to be shipped on the 8:10."

"Tell her by all means to telegraph," answered the president. "The people are counting on the oysters."

During the remainder of the entertainment

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messages were frequently exchanged between the two members of the committee. The Wainsborough train was belated, but the oysters had been ordered. Bettie lengthened the program by allowing Sarah Hobbs to recite the longest of her reader pieces and the musicians to play extra airs. Her spirits rose when she heard the Wainsborough train puff in at the station and she immediately began dressing the little old lady who was to wind up the entertainment.

The little lady was less than two feet high. The audience laughed over her in delight and marveled at her creation and listened eagerly to her song.

The widow's daughter had composed the old lady's song and this is what it was :

Yankee Doodle came from town
To price a country acre ;
He found a lovely hillside lot
And said that he would take her.

Yankee Doodle, ha, ha, ha !
Yankee Doodle Dandy !
He bought it in the summer time,
Oh, foolish Doodle Dandy.

The house went up on Doodle's lot
 With merry jest and banter,
 While Doodle on his pony's back
 Around the place did canter.

Yankee Doodle, ha, ha, ha !
 Yankee Doodle Dandy !
 "Be ready by the budding spring,"
 Said reckless Doodle Dandy

Yankee Doodle brought his girl
 To view the home so handy ;
 She stepped into a mud-hole thrice
 And quarreled with Doodle Dandy.

Yankee Doodle, ha, ha, ha !
 Yankee Doodle Dandy !
 He had the blues that budding day
 Had Yankee Doodle Dandy.

And up the road and down the road
 Came teams with mud bespattered ;
 The lady screamed, her cloak was ruined ;
 The teamsters wondered at her.

Yankee Doodle, ha, ha, ha !
 Yankee Doodle Dandy !
 Suddenly, "I have a thought !"
 Cried desperate Doodle Dandy.

"My stars alive ! why can't we lay
 A boardwalk high and handy,
 With siftings for the crossings O !"
 Said rapturous Doodle Dandy.

Yankee Doodle, ha, ha, ha !
 Yankee Doodle Dandy !

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"The place will be a different place,"
Said Yankee Doodle Dandy.

The railroad helped with willing hand,
The people all gave money,
Proud Doodle's property went up
And he gained back his honey.

Yankee Doodle, ha, ha, ha !
Yankee Doodle Dandy !
We're thankful that he came our way,
Wise Yankee Doodle Dandy.

After finishing her song, the little old lady invited the audience to step across to the oyster supper and the curtain descended upon her vigorously ringing a bell.

"I hope," said Bettie, undressing the diminutive lady, "that the oyster supper will be a success too." Then she ran out to meet the messenger and greeted him with a frightened, "Well?"

"Miss Katharine wants to know what she's to do," said the messenger; "there's not any oysters for the oyster supper."

CHAPTER XVI

THE OYSTERS

THE Primrose neighborhood was indignant. It had been swindled. It had responded heartily to the Boardwalk Committee's advertised invitation to an entertainment and an oyster supper and there had been no oysters. The committee, to be sure, had apologized profusely, but the fact remained, an oyster supper without oysters was a swindle pure and simple.

Mr. Williams wrote a threatening letter to that swindling concern, the Boardwalk Committee, in which he declared that if the siftings were not removed by the end of the week, the railroad authorities should be informed of the violation of one of its important rules.

"He wrote this letter," said the post-office clerk, "simply because he was served with supper at the oyster supper. What gluttons men are!"

"But what are we going to do about the siftings?" questioned Bettie.

"Somebody will have to haul them," returned

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the clerk, adding, "grandfather won't allow me to beg."

"Therefore if there's any begging to be done I will have to do it, I suppose," said the president resignedly. "Well, I'm off to the store."

The storekeeper met Bettie at the door of the store. "Say," he exclaimed, "the oysters have come."

"The oysters?" cried Bettie.

"What are you going to do about them?" asked Mr. Weever.

"What are you going to do about them, you mean," returned the president. "Why, send them back, of course."

Now in Mr. Weever's whole experience as a merchant he had never reshipped goods to the original owner. "Hardy would be as mad as fury," he said. "I reckon we can manage to sell the oysters in the neighborhood."

To attempt to sell the belated oysters to the disappointed Primrose people, would certainly be adding insult to injury. So at least it seemed to the president.

"The oysters are to be returned," she said, firmly. "I am glad, however, they are on the

station platform in evidence to our statement that they were ordered. There are some people, I believe, who have labored under the impression that we simply advertised the oysters as a drawing card."

"I'll take two gallons of them off your hands, Miss Bettie," said Mr. Weever, in a conciliatory voice.

"If I could sell the whole ten gallons without raising my little finger, Mr. Hardy should get his oysters back," said the president. "I'll consult with Katharine."

The public servant at first was not decisive. She said certainly the oysters ought to be returned and that, of course, Bettie could do what she pleased, but that if Mr. Weever would help to sell the oysters at a little profit, it appeared to her that it wouldn't be unwise to let him do it. By and by, however, her friend's arguments stirred her soul and she became wrathful on the other side of the question.

"Mr. Hardy spoiled the oyster supper," she said; "he has possibly ruined the prospects of a boardwalk in Primrose Hollow. Ship him back the oysters by all means, Bettie Porter."

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At the same time Mr. Weever was talking vehemently on the subject of the oysters.

"I tell you when a man has dealings with women he's got to be mighty careful," he said, in his excitement, spilling a stream of sugar upon the counter. "I doubt if we'll be able to hold another oyster supper here in Primrose. We won't be able to get the oysters, that will be the long and short of it."

"I didn't know as we had oysters at the oyster suppers here in Primrose," remarked a young fellow, entering the store and making a bee-line for the stove.

Thereupon the conversation about the stove waxed eloquent.

"There's oysters settin' on the platform up to the station now," said Ephram Lewis, "and Weever's got the job of reshippin' them to the oyster house. This here Boardwalk Committee is stirrin' things up a bit; they're takin' money out of a man's pocket right along." Mr. Lewis's two sons had attended the entertainment.

"I'd like to know where the committee's planning to lay the boardwalk," said Jim Hazelton. "Far's I can see there's no place in Prim-

rose to lay a boardwalk. The teams have got to be considered."

"The teams won't be considered, you may rely upon it," asserted John Spielman, emphatically. "The Boardwalk Committee is doing queer things all round. Like as not that feller will have to pay the freight on his oysters."

"Like as not," agreed Mr. Weever, his color rising.

There was a very appreciative listener to the foregoing conversation. He was not a loafer but had simply come into the store to warm himself. He was sitting apart from the others, his elbow touching the arm of his chair, his hand shading his keen little eyes. He was the only individual dwelling in the town of Primrose, with the exception of those energetic individuals forming the Boardwalk Committee, who would have dared return Mr. Hardy's oysters.

All eyes turned upon the widow's daughter when she again stepped into the store and repeated her order to Mr. Weever, asking him please to see to the reshipment at once.

Then it came to Ephram Lewis, in a flash, that this late arrival of the oysters was only a part of

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the swindle and he wondered what the president of that eternal concern, the Boardwalk Committee, was going to do next.

Next the girl gazed in a friendly manner at the group about the stove.

"Gentlemen," she said pleasantly, "I understand that our pile of siftings is in the way of the teams hauling to and from the station, and, of course, that oughtn't to be."

The young fellow gathered courage enough to repeat the words "of course," but he muttered them with his eyes upon his boots.

"We have orders from Mr. Williams to remove them," continued the president, "and I have come to ask you if you will be kind enough to help us to move them and to tell us where to put them." Her gray eyes met the eyes of Mr. Lewis.

"I reckon," said Mr. Lewis, feebly, "as mebbe the boys might help you out a little this afternoon; I don't know as they've got any partic'lar work on hand." He rose, grabbed his hat and hastily got out of the store.

"I s'pose," said Mr. Hazelton, also getting

upon his feet, "that I'll come along with the Lewises and haul a load or two for you."

Bettie was very grateful.

The other men around the stove were laughing bashfully. "We ain't got no teams," explained the young fellow.

Jim Hazelton turned at the door. "Where are we to haul the siftings to, Miss Bettie?" he asked.

"Where?" questioned Bettie of the men who owned no teams.

The young fellow was flattered.

"Dump it where the crossings are to be laid," he answered. "Perhaps," he added, "we might borrow a horse and cart or two from the Hollow folks and push the business a little."

"I don't know as I'd care to borrow a horse while the ground's so slippery," said a dissenting voice. "The Hollow folks is mighty keerful of their horses."

Then the appreciative listener uncovered his keen little eyes. "Look here," he said, "there's no use trying to get out of a little wholesome work in connection with a big improvement that

will benefit everybody. I'll lend both horses and carts and I'll furnish every man with a shovel. Don't worry yourself any further regarding the siftings, Miss Bettie; I'll see that they're hauled."

Mr. Stephen Caulk, in company with the other men, quitted the store and the president stared after them in helpless dismay.

Mr. Weever burst into ringing laughter. Then he remembered the oysters.

"Say, Miss Bettie," he said, beseechingly, "you reconsider that order about the oysters. The way you handle these Primrose fellows you can dispose of the ten gallons in a jiffy. You'll make something by it, too."

"I want the oysters returned," said Bettie.

Mr. Weever became savage. "You're not a very good business woman, let me tell you," he said.

Miss Porter's answer surprised him, nevertheless. "I'm afraid I'm not," she said, meekly enough.

It required a whole day to change the valuable siftings from one tremendous pile to those lesser piles where the crossings were to be laid. Mr. Caulk diligently overlooked the job.

"I wish," said the president, mournfully regarding the energetic overseer from the window of the post-office, "that Mr. Caulk wasn't so awfully fusty."

"Well, what can't be cured must be endured," said the clerk.

"Of course people will say that he's managing the Boardwalk Committee," continued the president; "and, mark my words, we're going to have lots of trouble."

"Well, he's not managing the Boardwalk Committee," said Katharine, her eyes flashing fire.

"No, and he's never going to," declared the widow's daughter.

The sum of eighty dollars had been paid into the committee's treasury when the two members determined to advertise another entertainment with refreshments, the latter to be served in the hall.

The stage still stood undisturbed in the dingy old warehouse. The stove occupied its place in the centre of the building, though both Bettie and Katharine wondered that Mr. Williams hadn't long since demanded its return to the unused station; for notwithstanding that the pile of

siftings had been carted away, the station agent continued on terms of enmity with the committee.

Dr. Harley was also vehement in his denunciations of the actions of the Boardwalk Committee. He exclaimed "Outrageous!" when he read the third announcement of an entertainment to be held in Primrose Hall.

"I wonder who will catch their death this time?" said the ruffled physician.

Now no one had caught his or her death in the old warehouse, but Sarah Hobbs had caught a severe cold in her teeth. The indignation of Mrs. Hobbs in due time spread itself over the Hollow.

"She is principally enraged," explained the clerk to Bettie, "because you haven't been to visit Sarah."

"I'm afraid of the dogs," said the president, helplessly, "and I am so awfully busy. I am sorry as I can be about the matter and, of course, we'll have to get some one else for the Rock of Ages."

The entertainment advertised was to be a duplicate of the entertainment that the Primrose people had so thoroughly enjoyed.

"Of course we will have to get another Rock of Ages," echoed Katharine.

"Jennie Armstrong is pretty," said the president, "and I don't imagine she'll catch cold in her teeth."

The program of the entertainment was altered to suit the times. The committee suddenly found difficulties closing about them. People who had thoroughly enjoyed the given entertainment were proclaiming the fact that "it wasn't much." Sarah Hobbs wept piteous tears because she wasn't to be allowed to run the risk of a second time catching cold in her teeth. It was declared that the entertainment wouldn't be worth a quarter and that the committee was treating Sarah Hobbs outrageously.

"One thing is certain," said the station agent, in a satisfied voice, "there will never be a board-walk in the Hollow. Eighty dollars isn't an insignificant sum but it's a long ways from two hundred and fifty. The Union Church Society has more than eighty dollars in the Wainsborough bank and the schoolhouse society frittered away the half of eighty dollars buying uniforms for the band men."

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"We have got to make a bold move toward something very definite," said the president. "Katharine Dobson, will you second my motion?"

"I guess I will," answered the clerk. "I've seconded every one of your motions up to date."

"Let's order the lumber for the boardwalk."

"Oh!" cried the clerk.

"The people must have confidence in us," continued Bettie. "I believe the boardwalk is a case of nothing venture nothing have; besides nothing succeeds like success. The fact that we have ordered the lumber will, at least, help to advertise the entertainment."

"Suppose we are never able to pay for the boards?" said the clerk.

"I'm not afraid," said the widow's daughter, holding high her head. "I have been talking to Peter Savage. Yes, he knows he's to be the carpenter. Peter Savage says that we'll have to solicit bids on the lumber."

"Oh!" cried the post-office clerk, clasping her hands enthusiastically.

"We will not announce whose bid is accepted

until after the entertainment," said the widow's daughter; adding triumphantly, "so the lumber men and all their friends will have to come to the show."

CHAPTER XVII

SOMETHING DEFINITE

THAT obliging carpenter, Peter Savage, offered his services to ride around the country and describe to various lumbermen exactly what sort of lumber the Boardwalk Committee wished to buy. For this purpose he borrowed the post-master's horse and spent two mornings and an afternoon in the performance of his self-imposed task.

The Boardwalk Committee wished to buy oak boards two inches thick and sawed into three feet lengths. The news was quickly circulated that the committee was receiving bids.

Then the carpenters in the neighborhood of the Hollow began making calculations preparatory to entering the list with the bidders for the work.

"It is rumored that Peter Savage is to be employed by the Boardwalk Committee," said the post-office clerk to Bettie, "but I am very non-committal on the subject."

"You'd better be," said the president. "So long as the carpenters are in doubt all of them will come to the entertainment. Well, they'll get the worth of their quarters. Even the people who are abusing us know that."

The bids for the lumber came in three days previous to the entertainment and the committee, in the presence of Peter Savage, opened them.

"We will not place our order until the morning after the entertainment, but we might as well know who's to get it," said the president.

"Certainly," agreed the post-office clerk, "and I am dying with curiosity to know exactly what the lumber is going to cost us."

There were six bids. Peter Savage was allowed to open them.

"Well," said the carpenter, handing the last paper to the president, "the old gentleman's bid the lowest."

"Who?" demanded the committee in a breath.

"Caulk."

Thereupon the committee turned pale.

"We didn't ask you to invite him to send in a bid, Mr. Savage," said the president.

"I didn't invite him," declared Peter. "I seen him yesterday consulting with old Boss Kennedy. He discovered, I reckon, just about what Boss Kennedy's bid would be."

"And made his lower," said the clerk.

"And made his lower," repeated Savage. "I tell you what, ladies, both Boss Kennedy and old man Caulk are offering you a bargain in oak lumber."

"Then," said the president, "we will accept Boss Kennedy's bid."

Peter Savage whistled.

"Yes," said Katharine, "we will accept Boss Kennedy's bid."

"Even if it isn't businesslike," said the president, answering Peter's whistle. "But, of course, we say nothing about it until after the entertainment."

That night Bettie Porter composed a set of verses and dispatched them in the morning to the mother of Marian Windsor, begging her to teach them to her little daughter.

"I am glad," said the president, with a sigh, "that Marian Windsor is so very bright and that her mother will see that she thoroughly knows

her new piece. We have got to be emphatic in everything if we are to get through with the building of the boardwalk."

Mr. Stephen Caulk walked beside the president of the committee the very next time she went to the post-office and he talked boardwalk to her all the way. The small horse-rack would have to be moved, he said, and about the large one he wasn't quite sure, there must be a change of some sort. He rubbed his hands together briskly and did not notice the silence of the widow's daughter.

The clerk at the post-office had evidently been crying.

"Grandfather has discovered that Mr. Caulk has sent in a bid," she confessed to her friend, "and I believe he knows it is the lowest, and he says that business is business. He knows that if we order the lumber from Mr. Caulk that the boardwalk will be smashed at once and yet he says that we will be compelled to accept the lowest bid."

"We are not going to do it," declared the president.

"Grandfather has guessed that, too," continued

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Katharine, and the tears welled up into her black eyes, "and he says that I must bear in mind that I'm a servant of the public."

"You're not a servant of Stephen Caulk," said the widow's daughter.

"He sends out more mail than any of the other patrons," murmured the clerk. "Bettie, grandfather says I cannot assist in turning down the bid of Mr. Caulk."

"Does that mean," asked the president, and there was just a little contempt in her voice, "that I am to go it alone?"

"I'm afraid it does," returned Katharine, very meekly. "It is no fault of mine." She brought out her pocketbook and took two dollars therefrom. "I'll pay this into the treasury," she said, and now her tears were flowing. "It will help the committee a little."

"Bettie Porter, Boardwalk Committee," said the widow's daughter. "That sounds fine. One thing is certain, Bettie Porter, Boardwalk Committee, will be quite capable of turning down the bid of Mr. Caulk."

"I would too," sobbed Katharine, "if it weren't for grandfather."

The flighty creature's head went down on the inner desk of the post-office.

For a minute Bettie regarded her through the wires, then she said persuasively, "Katharine, dear, let me in."

Inside the cage, the president put both her arms about her friend.

"I'm sure you cannot help it," she said; "it was mean of me to be angry. Your grandfather will let you look after the refreshments?"

"Ye-e-es," said Katharine.

"And you'll give me your support silently if you cannot give it to me openly, won't you, you poor little public servant?"

"Yes," said the poor little public servant.

It was well that the Primrose people dearly loved the excitement of an entertainment. Even the grumblers were interested. It wasn't to be a repetition of the first entertainment, as originally intended, but was to be improved by numerous novel features.

Bettie badly wanted a boy with a voice and she found him just in time. He was a cousin to Sue Rider, he was nearly six feet and he wore a mustache. The widow's daughter walked the

length and the breadth of Primrose Hollow in the company of James Franklin, the two of them engaged in earnest conversation.

"That there looks kind of bad for Tom," remarked Mr. Weever, watching the tall young man and the tall girl leaning on the bridge railing. "That there looks mighty bad for Tom."

"Tom Gregory is not very likely to git to the entertainment," said Jim Hazelton. "He wasn't at the other one. From the very beginning the feller set his foot down on the boardwalk movement. His aunts sent a basket to the supper but Tom didn't bring the basket. Tom set home and smoked his pipe and let the nigger carry the basket."

"Miss Bettie is a rusher," said Mr. Weever. "Hardy was furious about the oysters. Yes, indeed, he had to pay the freight both ways." The owner of the cash store had by degrees become reconciled to the part he had performed in the returning of the oysters and finally began bragging on it. "I reckon Tom Gregory will be the one to feel bad about not attending the entertainment, for the new bird's got mighty fine feathers."

"Come from the city, I s'pose," said Jim Hazelton.

Mr. Weever nodded.

"I reckon," said the other, with a laugh, "that he'll be mighty willing to pay his quarter."

The night of the entertainment was fair and consequently the hall was crowded. But the young man from the city did not pay his quarter. His height betrayed him when he appeared upon the stage, though his face was blacked and he was minus a mustache. Shouts of mirth ascended from the audience as Bettie Porter's gray dress, and little black cap were recognized.

"The president of the Boardwalk Committee is gunno give us a song," cried out a voice in the audience.

The song that filled the old warehouse was, "I'll Paddle My Own Canoe."

"She'll do it," muttered Dave Palmer, "that is if anybody can paddle a canoe in Primrose Hollow."

When the young man sang :

"I have no husband to bother my life,
No lover to prove untrue,"

the majority of the listeners were convulsed.

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"That's pretty hard on Tom," said Mr. Weever to his right-hand neighbor, "but he deserves it."

"It's a pity he ain't present to hear it," said the neighbor.

"He'll hear it to-morrow if he's living," concluded Mr. Weever with a suppressed burst of mirth. "I'll tell you what, that song is hitting other folks besides Tom."

Little Marian Windsor's recitation was also appreciated, even, as the Hollow blacksmith put it, by the people who were hit. Marian Windsor wore a pair of great rubber shoes and in the midst of her recitation she walked out of them and got into them again. Her shrill little voice penetrated to all parts of the warehouse; everyone drank in the words:

"I have come to speak this evening
On a subject much discussed,
About which some folks have argued
And a very few have fussed;
And I must say I'm astonished
That each and every man
Can fail to duly 'preciate
Our very excellent plan.
A boardwalk in the Hollow
Is needed mighty bad.
Why, the mud's enough to make us
Grow weary, worn and sad.

For if I start out calling
 Adown a Primrose street,
 I'm bound to lose my overshoes
 And soil my tidy feet ;
 And when I stoop to get my gums,
 Good gracious ! I declare,
 My gloves are ruined forever,
 And I can't go anywhere.
 Now we ladies say we'll build a walk,
 A noble walk and true,
 To give the money, gentlemen,
 Is all we ask of you."

The refreshments, consisting chiefly of ice cream and cake, were served in the hall directly after the entertainment ; indeed two things never came closer together than did the "show" and the "festival."

It was late when Bettie left the warehouse. The young fellow who had sacrificed his mustache for the "fun of the thing" walked by her side up the hill. The singer was pleased with himself and he wanted the girl to tell him exactly how his song and his costume had impressed the public.

"I trust, at least, that you were satisfied, Miss Porter," he said. "I really did the best that I could on such short notice."

"You did very well," said Bettie.

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"I imagine the audience was not over critical." Here the singer smiled. "But I certainly must have been worth laughing at in that rig, 'pon my soul I must."

"Oh, I am sure the Primrose people are quite able to criticise," said the girl. "Sometimes, you know, we country people are superior to city people."

"You are not all countrified, Miss Porter," said the singer in an admiring voice.

Miss Porter wasn't pleased. "*I* am countrified," she retorted. "How could I be anything else? I have lived in the country all my life. I love the country. I hope I may die in the country."

They had almost reached the top of the hill when a buggy passed them. A lantern fastened to the front of the buggy threw the pair of horses into bold relief, but left the rest of the world in darkness to the occupants.

"Taum he wasn't at the entertainment," declared a loud voice, "but he wasn't far off. I seen him come out the provision store and he was pretty tottery. I didn't know he went there; I never seen Taum on a tear before."

Then the singer put a question. "Who's Taum?" he asked with a laugh.

In answer, the girl said, "Thank you, I'm home now, good-bye," and went hurriedly through the gate belonging to the long, lean house.

The singer gazed after her, understanding thoroughly who Taum was.

CHAPTER XVIII

A DISCLOSED SECRET

"THAT there was a pretty good piece the city feller got off last night in the old warehouse," said Mr. Dave Palmer, speaking to a crowd of milk boys in the station. "She'll paddle her own canoe all right, will Miss Bettie. Cutting off his mustache wasn't a bad idea, and he certainly took off to perfection that way of throwing up her head that the widow's daughter's caught from her ma."

"I don't feel so sure about Bettie Porter or any other gal paddling her own canoe here in the Hollow," said a dissenting voice. "The committee ain't got the necessary money by a long shot, and there's no telling what'll happen to prevent any such fracas going ahead in Primrose; besides there's some folks of the opinion that the boardwalk won't be no improvement."

"Hold on!" interrupted Mr. Palmer. "Was you at the entertainment yesterday?"

"Yaas, I was at the entertainment," drawled the grumbler.

"And you heard the boardwalk president give us her song?"

"I heard the city feller crow," said the grumbler, with a grin at his own wit; "but there's talk in the neighborhood that it ain't ladylike for no gal to build a boardwalk, and there's also talk in the neighborhood, plenty of it too, that old man Caulk is waiting his chance."

"For what?" demanded Mr. Palmer.

"For everything," was the answer.

"Are the rest of us going to be sat down upon by old man Caulk?" asked the farmer energetically.

"He sat down on the Union Church business all right," said another grumbler.

"And he sat plumb down on the schoolhouse," said another.

Dave Palmer went to the door of the station and whistled, such a clear whistle it was that a very little girl, who had remained all night at the Hollow, paused on her way to the post-office and looked across at the whistler.

"Do you want me for anything?" inquired little Marian Windsor, for it was she.

"Want you for something immense," cried Mr. Palmer. "No matter if you have lost your overshoes and got your gloves soiled. We want you here this minute to stand up amongst a lot of idle fellers and make your speech."

"I didn't wear any gloves," said the literal little girl, at which the idle fellows laughed uproariously.

She came, nevertheless, eagerly, for the love of appreciation and publicity had entered into her quiet but rash little being.

"I'm afraid I can't do it good," she said, "without a pair of great big overshoes like you seen me have last night, but maybe I can just pretend."

"I am sure you can just pretend in a perfectly satisfactory manner," said Mr. Palmer. "Here, stand on the bench. No, it ain't high enough. I reckon you won't mind standing in the window, so's everybody can see."

"No, I won't mind," declared the eager little maid, "only I better be careful when I pretend about the overshoes or I might fall off the sill."

The idle fellows could hardly stop laughing even when Marian held up her hand for silence.

"Hush!" ordered Dave Palmer, and silence fell.

"I have come to speak this evening ——"

The speech was interrupted.

"Morning, ma'am," said one of the idle fellows.

"It's evening," said Marian, staunchly.

"It may be evening in the speech, lady, but it's morning here in the station or we wouldn't be laying around so handy," said another idle fellow, grinning at the perplexity of the sweet little face.

"Say morning instead of evening, just to please 'em," said Mr. Palmer, persuasively.

"It isn't morning in the piece," persisted Marian, "and if I say morning I'll get it all wrong, 'cause I have to talk fast anyway."

"Evening for morning ain't any worse than some of the other mistakes on the record of the Boardwalk Committee; let her say it," ordered a sullen voice from a corner.

With this permission Marian Windsor made a polite little bow, and began her "speech," but in the agitation of the moment she used the word "morning" instead of the word "evening," and her voice, having been trained to be heard in the old warehouse quite filled the station; in fact, the words were thundered at the limited audience :

"I have come to speak this morning
 On a subject much discussed,
 About which some folks have argued
 And a very few have fussed ;
 And I must say I'm astonished
 That each and every man
 Can fail to truly 'preciate
 Our very excellent plan.
 A boardwalk in the Hollow
 Is needed mighty bad —
 Why, the mud's enough to make us
 Grow weary, worn and sad.
 For if I start out calling
 Adown a Primrose street,
 I'm bound to lose my overshoes
 And soil my tidy feet ;
 And when I stoop to get my gums,
 Good gracious ! I declare,
 My gloves are ruined forever
 And I can't go anywhere.
 Now, we ladies say we'll build a walk,
 A noble walk and true.
 To give the money, gentlemen,
 Is *all* we ask of you."

She made her bow amid a rousing cheer and Mr. Palmer was about to lift her from the window when a sudden thought assailed him.

"Look here," he said, "I'm going to pass around the hat in the interests of the boardwalk, for such a fine speech as this we've just listened to has got to bring a little United States currency to the fore."

The hat was passed and the idle fellows, grinning hard, jingled the coins in their pockets and each and every one of them put something into the hat.

"Am I to give it to the Boardwalk Committee?" cried Marian Windsor. "Oh, thank you, gentlemen."

Everybody was in a good humor when something happened. It seemed, indeed, as if Primrose Hollow was destined for very short periods of peace and brotherly love. Decidedly the man who came rushing into the gentlemen's waiting room at that moment had cast brotherly love to the winds. His hat was on the back of his head, his face was red and ugly with passion.

"Say," he cried, "have you heered the latest?"

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"Don't know, Joe, whether we have or not," said Mr. Palmer, getting very close to the window and putting his arm protectingly around the little speechmaker. "This ain't no place to fight."

"Nor to reason neither, I reckon!" cried Joe, derisively.

Then to the wonder of them all, little Marian Windsor, emboldened by the victory of her speech and the weight of the hat which Mr. Palmer was kindly helping her to hold, exclaimed, in a high-pitched and determined voice, "It's a place where gentlemen give money to the boardwalk."

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!" roared the idle fellows, and for a while Joe was left in the cold.

Even in the cold, however, Joe's anger increased in heat. "It's all very well," he said, "to roar laughing at nothing, but one thing's certain not another cent of my money ever goes toward no such contarnal thing as this here boardwalk. Taum he thinks that a gal who carries a cake through the town of Primrose or any other town ain't the kind of gal that's fit fer him."

"Taum he's fit for the Queen of England, I reckon!" sneered an idle fellow who had put a quarter into Dave Palmer's hat.

"She ain't carried ary cake through the Hollow far's I know," came from the corner.

"She'll do it yet," fumed Joe, "and the whole of you will be bamboozled into taking chances,—as for who will get the cake, I ain't saying. A pretty face and dimples ain't going to lord it over me."

"What are you fuming about, anyway, Joe?" demanded Mr. Palmer, good-humoredly. "We was holding a sociable little meeting when you burst in and disturbed the program; but even the little ladies in this part the country ain't skeery; some places they'd been holding hard to my neck or somewheres and been screaming with their faces hid. There's pluck among the Primrose ladies, little and big, sure and certain."

"Oh, yes," muttered Joe, "and bravery and audacity and all them big-sounding things. What happened over yonder in the warehouse last night? A pretty good entertainment and a pretty good ice-cream supper afterward, every one of you is ready to state that. If you knowed

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what I know, you'd quit grinning, for, of course, all of you was there, and all of you tasted of that cream."

"And you lie if you say it wasn't good," said a defiant voice. "It was bought at the creamery and it wasn't made of the buttermilk neither."

"I'm not saying what it was made of," said Joe, doggedly, "for I don't know."

"Out with what you do know, Joe, and get it over," ordered Mr. Palmer, looking like a wise and generous judge eager to deliver an already formed opinion.

"Them ice cream saucers," said Joe, "they wasn't washed."

"Wasn't washed?" thundered the judge.

"The dish-water and the pan was both clean forgot," continued Joe, almost complacently, "that's the way the Boardwalk Committee does some of its business." Then he fired up again: "We was all wanting cream; some of us was wanting cream in a hurry; some of us fellers was treating ladies; and they made it up amongst 'em, in the rumpus behind the curtain that, not understanding, we was laughing at, that as they didn't have the pan and water there wasn't no

use getting 'em, the Primrose people wasn't worth all that trouble; they'd just pass the saucers in where the water was supposed to be and pass 'em out again, pretending they was washed. They was going to keep it secret, of course; but them kind of secrets has a way of leaking out mighty quick."

"I reckon you've made a mistake, Joe," said the judge, who had eaten three saucers of ice cream. "I reckon that ain't true," but even as he uttered the protest there came to him a vivid remembrance of the stickiness of the boardwalk saucers and the unaccountable spot that each of them had made upon his knee.

"I swear it's true," said Joe. He pointed a finger at Marian Windsor. "Little as she is she knows it. Some of her folks was in the secret and like as not was laughing over it last night. Don't you see by her face, that little as she is, she's in it?"

"I'm not in it at all," flamed out the little speechmaker, "and we wasn't laughing about it at all. We was awful sorry; but Bettie Porter she said that any way we all got to eat our peck of dirt."

CHAPTER XIX

STEPHEN CAULK'S BID

BOSS KENNEDY's bid had been accepted by the Boardwalk Committee. This bit of news ran about the Hollow and overflowed it, then it ran about the neighborhood of the Hollow and overflowed it. Nor was the bit of news unattended. Close to it, wrapped about it as it were, was that other startling item : Stephen Caulk's bid, the lowest bid received, had been turned down by the Boardwalk Committee.

Other reports followed. It was declared that long ago the Boardwalk Committee had dissolved, the doctor's daughter had been out of the concern for weeks, as had also Sue Rider and the lawyer's girl. It was whispered, mysteriously at first, that Katharine Dobson had had no hand whatever in the turning down of Stephen Caulk's bid though, no doubt, she would have been glad to aid and abet anything of a swindling character if the aged postmaster hadn't been determined to hang on to his job. The widow's

daughter, all alone, had turned down the bid of Stephen Caulk. For awhile the Hollow, together with the whole surrounding country, was terribly excited. Even Mr. Weever, exulting in the fact that he had performed the feat of returning ordered oysters, was thunderstruck at Bettie's audacity.

"Yes, 'pon my soul," said the owner of the cash store, "Miss Bettie has turned down the bid of old man Caulk."

"Caulk's bid was the lowest?" interrogated Jim Hazelton.

"Caulk's bid was the lowest," answered the merchant.

"Business is business," said the Hollow people in a single voice, "and if Caulk's bid was the lowest it ought to have been accepted."

"'Tis a pity though," asserted Mr. Dave Palmer, "that Stephen Caulk ever sent in a bid. Why couldn't the fellow let the girls alone?"

"There isn't but one girl," said the sewing-machine agent.

Mr. Weever suddenly bent in two with a burst of laughter. "And she broke your buggy, Selby," he roared, "and you haven't forgot it."

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"We are talking about lumber, I believe," said Mr. Selby, with dignity.

"Taum Gregory he hasn't had no say in the matter, I s'pose?" questioned a voice stoveward. "I heered that Taum and the gal had quarreled."

"Tom isn't a fellow for fooling with women-kind," said Hazelton. "He set his face against the boardwalk from the beginning. Tom give out that night of the entertainment that he'd washed his hands of the widow's daughter."

As the men in the store laughed appreciatively at young Gregory's judicious handwashing, the post-office clerk was speaking seriously to the widow's daughter.

"They are fussing in every direction, Bettie Porter," she said; "they are saying the craziest things. One would think that every man who ever steps foot in the Hollow was a sworn friend to Stephen Caulk."

"If we had accepted Mr. Caulk's bid matters would be infinitely worse," declared Bettie. "Then they would say that Stephen Caulk was going to swindle them, now it is me. With Mr. Caulk managing the affair there would never be

a boardwalk, but I am going to succeed in laying a boardwalk whether the people want it or not."

Katharine regarded her friend admiringly. "You are like that man in Washington," she said. "You will never give up. And the Primrose people are treating you just like Washington people treated Boss Shepard. I believe that a person has to suffer a great deal before any marked improvement can be brought about in places like Washington and Primrose Hollow."

The post-office door opened and Mr. Weever came in. His expression was mysterious.

"Say," he began, after closing the door, "do you people know that Boss ——"

"We were just discussing him," interrupted the clerk. "We know that all sorts of unkind things were said of him, but the time will come when Primrose Hollow is as proud of Bettie Porter even as Washington City is proud of Boss Shepard."

The public servant waved her hand in a theatrical manner while Mr. Weever burst into ringing laughter.

"Boss Shepard," repeated the storekeeper, as soon as he could recover his voice.

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"You needn't laugh," said the clerk gravely. "What I have said is true."

"I wasn't thinking of Boss Shepard," returned Mr. Weever, "I was thinking of our own old Boss Kennedy."

"What of him?" demanded Bettie.

"This much of him," explained Mr. Weever, "his wood land is levied on. If you get your lumber of him and pay for it, you'll never see your money again and your lumber will be seized."

"Seized?" cried the widow's daughter, her face paling.

"My name is not to appear in the matter," continued the storekeeper. "A man in public business has got to be careful. Stephen Caulk's bid was the lowest anyway."

"Do you Primrose people desire Stephen Caulk to manage your boardwalk?" asked Bettie, in a tone suggesting that she herself lived miles away.

Mr. Weever made a grimace. "Business is business," he said.

"Mr. Caulk managed your Union Church beautifully!" exclaimed the widow's daughter,

elevating her eyebrows, "and saw to the building of your much-needed schoolhouse in the nick of time. The Hollow is certainly to be congratulated in its possession of a Stephen Caulk."

"Well," questioned Katharine, upon the disappearance of the storekeeper, "what's to be done about the lumber?"

"Boss Kennedy is not to furnish it, of course," answered Bettie. "Oh, for an honest and interested legal adviser!"

"Go to Mr. Tarr," suggested Katharine.

"Ask Elizabeth to typewrite a letter to him, you mean," returned Bettie. "My dear, I am not yet that hard up."

"Go to Peter Savage," said the clerk tragically.

When Peter Savage was consulted he again offered his services. He would carry a note to Boss Kennedy and afterward inspect the other obtainable lumber, with the exception, of course, of Mr. Caulk's, and buy the best for the money.

"Kennedy won't make any fuss," said the carpenter. "He'll not be surprised. When a man's property is levied on, he's looking out for fresh perplexities."

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Upon the obliging carpenter asking the loan of the postmaster's horse, he was refused.

"It will never do," said the aged postmaster, "for me to implicate myself with the boardwalk business; there is too much talk in the community and a public servant must be careful."

Once upon a time Bettie Porter had hidden in the post-office sanctum to escape a meeting with the irate station master, but she did not attempt to hide when Katharine informed her, in a scared voice, that Mr. Stephen Caulk was rushing for the office.

The wiry little old man rushed into the office and bowed to the girls. His smile was not a pleasant thing to see when he said, "Miss Porter, I have a question to put to you. Why was it that you turned down my bid?"

It had been easy enough to dilate upon the subject with Katharine Dobson aiding and abetting; it had been easy enough to prevail upon the widow that this action was necessary for the honor and glory of Primrose and the establishment of a boardwalk but, no, it would not be easy to give Mr. Stephen Caulk a straightforward answer to his question.

"We chose the bid that we thought would prove most satisfactory," said Bettie, and the clerk, who, obeying the order of her grandsire, had deserted the committee, felt pleased and flattered over the "we."

Mr. Caulk also noticed it.

"I understood that you alone represented the Boardwalk Committee, Miss Porter," he said, ironically.

"I do," answered Bettie.

"And that you alone are responsible for the turning down of my bid."

"Yes," answered Bettie, wishing in her heart that she had also overlooked the hauling of the siftings.

"Don't you know that there must be a reason for turning down a man's bid?" questioned the rich man of the Hollow.

"I had several reasons," answered the girl.

"One good reason is sufficient," said Stephen Caulk. "Will you kindly give me one good reason?"

"I do not see that it is necessary for me to give you one, two or three of my good reasons, Mr. Caulk," said Bettie, coolly.

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"I expected as much." The wiry little man laughed shortly. "Miss Porter," he continued, "this is a matter that must be settled. It is my intention to summon you before a magistrate where you will be obliged to answer the questions that are put to you. I will have my witnesses; you can have yours."

Rage was in the voice of Stephen Caulk and righteous indignation flashed from the eyes of the widow's daughter.

"I will have my witnesses and you can have yours," repeated Mr. Caulk.

"I will not appear before a magistrate," declared Bettie, proudly.

"You won't appear before a magistrate, not when you are summoned?" roared the rich man of the Hollow. "You mean to say, Miss Porter, that you will defy the law?"

"I mean," answered Bettie, "that I will never appear before a magistrate."

"You are responsible for the people's money," he said threateningly.

"I can take good care of the people's money," said Bettie, emphasizing the word good.

"You have accepted the bid of a man whose wood land is levied on," continued Mr. Caulk.

To this Bettie said nothing.

"I own a large amount of property in the Hollow," said Mr. Caulk.

"Your home, six houses and the horse-rack," said Bettie.

The little keen eyes flashed fire when the girl coolly mentioned the horse-rack standing in the public road. "When a person is summoned before a magistrate she is bound to appear," wound up the old gentleman, excitedly. Thereupon he rushed out of the post-office, closing the door sharply.

"Well," cried the clerk, "what are you going to do?"

"I am going ahead and buy the lumber as soon as I see Peter Savage again," Bettie answered. "Katharine, I must say your grandfather acted mean about not lending the horse."

Katharine nodded. "Bettie Porter," she said, turning the subject away from the postmaster

and his horse, "I never in my life saw any one as brave as you. I really believe you are afraid of nothing."

"Do I look as if I would be able to build a boardwalk for Primrose Hollow?" asked Bettie, coming close to the wires and staring hard at her friend.

"You do," said the clerk, earnestly.

"If I had a chair I'd sit down," said the widow's daughter.

"Come in," said the clerk, hospitably opening the cage door. "You speak lightly of everything but you manage like a man. What are you going to do when that miserable old Caulk has you summoned before a magistrate?"

"Be ill," said Bettie, promptly.

"You clever being!" cried the clerk, enthusiastically; "I never thought of that."

"When Mr. Caulk was storming at me, did I appear cool, calm and collected?" questioned Bettie.

"You did," said Katharine with decision.

"Was I businesslike?"

"Indeed you were."

"You think I surprised Mr. Stephen Caulk?"

"I think," said the clerk, with a gasp, "that Mr. Caulk fully expected to come in here and scare you into accepting his bid. Instead he has gone off baffled and furious and left you undisturbed."

"Now I am going to tell you how I feel," said Bettie, leaning back a little heavily in her chair. "I feel perfectly miserable. I should like to stand out on the post-office porch and distribute the valuable money for which I am responsible to its original owners. I should like to board the train and leave Primrose Hollow for always. I feel as if I needed relaxation and rest." She gave a nervous little laugh.

"You're not going to do anything foolish?" cried the clerk, aghast. "Bettie Porter, we never could return the things to eat."

"No, I am not going to do anything foolish," said Bettie, wearily.

Katharine Dobson spoke aloud to herself after the widow's daughter departed. "Bettie Porter is the sweetest girl in the Hollow," she said, "and a girl that means to accomplish something too. The idea of that wretched old Stephen Caulk threatening her with the law and a magis-

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trate! Even if I am a public servant I would help Bettie Porter in her trouble if grandfather would let me. Oh, I hope that she'll summon me for a witness!"

CHAPTER XX

A THREAT

MR. STEPHEN CAULK was seen to get into his buggy and lay his whip upon his horse in a passion and start up the Hollow hill in the direction of the home of the Primrose magistrate, and everybody who saw him understood that it was his intention to force his bid, by way of law, upon that independent damsel, Bettie Porter, Boardwalk Committee ; but fortunately for the Boardwalk Committee, the magistrate was sick in bed.

Mrs. Porter, learning of the delayed summons, was terribly perturbed. The magistrate might get out of bed at any minute and be able to write a summons ; for, she supposed, that a summons was written. Who would serve the summons ? When and where would it be served ? These were also deep-dyed mysteries.

“ Bettie,” she said at last, “ we’ll not answer a knock at the door unless we know for sure who is knocking and what he is after. I do not un-

derstand exactly how a summons is managed, but I'm sure it is necessary to see a person in order to serve them with a summons. Oh, that miserable, miserable man, to think of his threatening to serve my daughter with a summons!"

But Bettie was not the kind of a girl to remain secreted in the event of the summons. She went ahead and purchased the boardwalk lumber from Girard West, agreeing to pay twelve dollars per thousand feet for good oak boards sawed into three feet lengths.

"The widow's daughter has gone and bought the lumber," said the Hollow people. They studied the contributors' list in the post-office and wondered more and more.

"You have heered that the widow's daughter is to be summoned before a magistrate to give her reason for not accepting old man Caulk's bid?" This question was put to some one every day, and though the some one had always "heered" he was nothing loath to further discuss the subject.

"Caulk sent in his bid and 'twas the lowest. Business is business," reiterated the Primrose people. "If Caulk's bid was the lowest it ought to

have been accepted ; certainly, it ought to have been accepted."

"What does Primrose Hollow want with a boardwalk, anyway?" was another question. "Has the Hollow got a church building? Has the Hollow got a schoolhouse?"

"We are expected to put our hands into our pockets and fetch up more money now that the lumber is purchased," continued the Hollow people. "Those boards are being sawed into three feet lengths; that means they're to lay crossways on the ties. The ties are ordered, too, of Girard West."

"If the boards was laid lengthwise the walk would cost a heap less," growled Mr. Lewis.

"Yes," agreed Jim Hazleton, "and 'twould walk easier."

"Come, come!" cried Mr. Palmer, "the walk will be stronger if the boards is crossways; the long boards would warp in no time."

"Stephen Caulk has been insulted right here in Primrose Hollow," declared Mr. Rider, with emphasis. "Stephen Caulk isn't used to being insulted. He has done more for the Hollow than any man in the place."

"He has built six houses which he rents at unreasonably high rates," said Mrs. Rider.

"The widow's daughter is playing a pretty ticklish game, in my opinion," continued the storekeeper, "a pretty ticklish game."

Many people entertained an opinion similar to Mr. Rider's. The widow's daughter was foolishly saying that it wouldn't be a bad idea to have the trial, or whatever it might be called, in the old warehouse and charge twenty-five cents admission fee. In this way the fund in the treasury might swell to beautiful proportions. The widow's daughter was also foolishly saying that if Mr. Stephen Caulk ever forced her into a witness stand she would certainly say some things that he, Mr. Stephen Caulk, would prefer not to hear.

"Miss Bettie Porter is going to learn what real trouble is before she is through with this boardwalk business," declared Mr. Weever, prophetically.

"This here trial," said Mr. Lewis, "which, I reckon, will come up as soon as the magistrate gets on his legs, will probably finish the boardwalk business. After that maybe the

Hollow will be allowed to go along at her old pace."

"Pretty slow and steady," said Mr. Weever, with a burst of laughter.

Bettie Porter showed her wisdom when she went ahead. By and by the Hollow people began to feel a sort of vague admiration for the girl who was threatened with that direful thing, a summons ; in fact, with a summons staring her in the face, had dared to order the lumber. Numbers of them visited West's sawmill, viewed the lumber and acknowledged to themselves that it was a first-rate article.

The magistrate remained accommodatingly in bed even after the lumber was sawed to the last foot.

"Mr. West has sent word that we must get the boards away at once," announced the post-office clerk, gazing excitedly at the widow's daughter through Uncle Sam's window. "He is blustering awfully about the matter ; says he wants the room. On Wednesday he is coming for his money."

"For a part of his money, according to a written agreement," corrected Bettie.

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"Who is going to haul the boards?" demanded the clerk.

"The farmers," returned Bettie.

"You are going to ask them?"

"I am."

"Bettie Porter," said the clerk, almost enviously, "you are certainly possessed of unlimited cheek." But her voice grew doleful as she went on, "They have been talking outrageously about you and I know that they will refuse to haul the lumber. This is the way it will be: The boards will rot in the woods, Mr. West will become the possessor of the boardwalk fund, there will never be a boardwalk, and we, the Boardwalk Committee of Primrose Hollow will be disgraced."

"We?" interrogated Bettie, cruelly.

"Yes," answered Katharine, "we. Every one of the Primrose girls is still at heart a member of the committee, every one of us is furious about the way Mr. Caulk is acting."

This was true. Sue Rider darted out of her father's store and embraced the widow's daughter on the highway.

"You are too good to live," she said, enthusi-

astically. "You are the bravest girl that ever walked the earth, Bettie Porter, and everybody knows it."

"Do they?" said Bettie, a little forlornly; "I'm glad to hear it, for I've got to ask somebody to haul the boardwalk lumber."

"No man with any manliness in him can refuse," said Sue. "If I can help you let me know."

"Thank you, I will," said Bettie, smiling faintly.

That night Mary Harley and Elizabeth Tarr descended their own Hollow hill and ascended the hill always identified with the long, lean house. Sitting in the widow's parlor they declared to Bettie that they always had and always would consider themselves her warm and staunch friends.

"Bettie," asked Mary Harley, in an interested voice, "what are you going to do when Mr. Caulk has you summoned?"

"At first," answered Bettie, "I thought I would be sick, but that would be cowardly; I have decided to appear. It may be, however, that the magistrate will not recover until the

boardwalk is laid in Primrose Hollow and that Mr. Caulk will thereupon relinquish his idea of the summons."

"Not he," said Elizabeth Tarr. "He'll summon you or die. Bettie, do you know, I believe that father in his heart considers you a wonderful being. Of course, you are wonderful."

"Oh, very wonderful," said Bettie, lightly.

"You are as bold as a lion," declared Miss Harley. "How are you going to get the rest of the money?"

"By hook or by crook," returned Bettie.

"I wish," declared Miss Harley, "that you had fined every one of us ten dollars. Father says it will cost you two dollars a load to get the lumber from the mill."

The next morning the widow's daughter rose early and was down at the station when the milk wagons arrived. She appealed to every milk man to help haul the lumber from the mill.

It was difficult for a Primrose man, with all his faults, to deny a favor to a lady. The spring ploughing was begun; the favor, therefore, was asked at an unpropitious season. This special

lady, moreover, had been discussed unfavorably in the stores and the shops and the station. Eph Lewis said afterward that if a man had dared to ask him to stop his spring ploughing in order to enter into a gratuitous hauling match he would have talked rough to him but, that like the other fellers, he had promised the widow's daughter to help her out, grinning the while as if he were a booby.

"People are good," said Bettie Porter, as she watched the first load of lumber approaching over the bridge. "They say that the sawmill road is in a deplorable condition."

The hauling continued intermittently for three days. On the afternoon of the third day the last two teams came over the bridge, one directly behind the other, the men shouting to one another from the saddles.

Mr. Stephen Caulk heard the shouting voices as he boarded the 4:30 train for Wainsborough. He seated himself in the car and looked out the window. As far as his keen little eyes could see there were regular piles of oak boards, good stout oak boards sawed into three feet lengths. He took up his newspaper and spread it before

him. The hands that held the paper shook a little.

Mr. Girard West appeared on the appointed day and hour to receive the promised portion of his lumber money. He was a huge, good-natured fellow, who laughed appreciatively at the committee's request that he help to count his pay. Much of the treasury fund was in silver, very much of it in small silver. Mr. West desired the loan of the bag wherein Katharine had kept it and he tied the string carefully above the treasure before bidding good-bye to the committee.

"There!" exclaimed the clerk, "there is just seventy-five cents left in the treasury."

"The giant has carried off the bag of gold," said Bettie, laughing. "I hope he doesn't meet Mr. Caulk."

"What are you going to do next, Bettie?" inquired the public servant.

"Next," said Bettie, "I am going to buy the nails on credit and hire the carpenter on credit."

"O Bettie Porter," cried the clerk, "aren't you running a terrible risk?"

"I'm not afraid," returned the Boardwalk Committee.

The Hollow carpenters wanted to know of the world in general when the Boardwalk Committee or Bettie Porter or whoever was managing the affair intended to receive bids for the carpenter's work. They were still discussing the matter when Peter Savage, with the assistance of a colored helper, began breaking the earth opposite the widow's gate. Thereupon the Hollow carpenters, who had dreaded lest Peter Savage would manage to put in the lowest bid, were nearly paralyzed to think that he had been given the work sans ceremonie; there had been no bids.

The boardwalk across from the widow's gate lay directly in front of the yard of Mr. Caulk. The old gentleman returned one day from a week's absence and found it there, for Peter Savage had finished up a short bit of the walk to see how it would look previous to going on with the work of laying the ties, thinking it prudent, no doubt, to get through with that part close to the premises of Stephen Caulk during the absence of the owner. Mr. Caulk critically surveyed that strip of boardwalk, stepped upon it, walked its length. The following day he was in

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the middle of the Primrose road, laying down the law of boardwalk building to the genial carpenter who had the job.

"Have you seen Mr. Caulk or rather has Mr. Caulk seen you?" asked the post-office clerk in a voice of alarm as Bettie, spying a letter in the widow's box, stood impatiently waiting its deliverance.

"No," answered the Boardwalk Committee. "Why?"

"He is raving mad about the short horse-rack."

"Why?" asked Bettie again.

"Because of your telling Peter Savage it will have to be moved into the road below the Standard Scales. He declares it shan't be done."

"I never gave Peter Savage any such order," declared Bettie. "That would be an awful place. There will have to be a crossing for the teams to get to the horse-rack. I dare say Peter Savage is trying to have some fun."

"There is bound to be trouble about the long horse-rack," said the clerk, presently. "I wish you hadn't reminded Mr. Caulk of his ownership."

Oh, I know you were only ironical, but he thinks he owns it for all that."

Once upon a time Mr. Stephen Caulk had been the possessor of Mr. Weever's store. Naturally if the horse-rack belonged to anything it belonged to the store, but Stephen Caulk had not included the horse-rack in the bargain.

That night the clerk paid a brief visit to the long, lean house. "I was right, Bettie," she said. "The boardwalk has got to stop at the long horse-rack and everything will be spoiled. What do you think Mr. Stephen Caulk has threatened to do?" She gave an agitated gasp and wound up dramatically, "He has threatened to shoot any man, white or black, who attempts to move the long horse-rack."

CHAPTER XXI

AN AWFUL SOMETHING

PERHAPS it is not easy as some people think it is to carry what is called a "bold front." That the widow's daughter was carrying a bold front was evident. It was said, in current gossip, that Bettie Porter would be sorry enough for her reckless extravagance at the present time when, in the future, she came into possession of those few hundred dollars bequeathed her in her father's last will and testament. Primrose Hollow was, indeed, going to have a boardwalk, but Primrose Hollow, notwithstanding the begging and raking and scraping, was not able to pay for the whole of the boardwalk. Bettie Porter would be obliged to pay over a hundred dollars out of her own pocket. Primrose Hollow held its breath and then whistled. But it would be two years before the widow's daughter gained possession of her few hundred dollars. Would Mr. West be willing to wait two years for the hundred dollars due him on the lumber? Would

Peter Savage, obliging and cheerful as was his manner, be willing to wait two years for a settlement? Primrose doubted. Bettie Porter probably might mortgage herself to the widow in order to liquidate the debts of the biggest improvement in the Hollow.

Fresh troubles enveloped the widow's daughter during the work of laying the ties. Every man, woman or child who walked the Primrose road had remarks to make upon the distance of the ties and upon the chosen site of the boardwalk; every man who had ever jumped into a mud-hole in Primrose Hollow felt privileged to step forward with his suggestion; every farmer whose teams plied between the station and his farm was demonstratively certain that the widow's daughter was making a "muss" of the affair, but the wrathiest man in the whole country was Tom Gregory.

"Taum he says that he's gunno run over the corner of that there boardwalk with his wagon wheel," said a milk man with an appreciative laugh. "Taum he says that there corner of the boardwalk is gunno infringe upon the rights of the public road. Every public road has got to

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have its regular number of feet. If a public road ain't thirty feet wide the parties on one side or t'other or on both sides is guilty of trespass. Taum says that in his opinion the entire boardwalk is infringin' upon the rights of the public road."

Peter Savage, obeying the injunction of Bettie Porter, Boardwalk Committee, measured the public road. It measured thirty-two feet without taking in the boardwalk.

There was a certain little irregularity in the boardwalk later on that was displeasing to the eyes of the widow's daughter. In truth every now and then there was a step.

"They are dangerous," said Bettie, gazing dejectedly at one of the steps but thinking of them all. "It is possible that at night a person might get a bad fall."

Mr. Savage laughed.

"Folks'll get used to them," he answered; "and 't isn't often dark."

"It would be nice," said the post-office clerk, when her opinion was solicited, "if Primrose Hollow could have lamps too. Why don't you give another entertainment right away?"

"I'm afraid to give another entertainment," returned Bettie and she tried and succeeded in not sighing.

"Why?" demanded Katharine.

"Enough's enough," answered the Boardwalk Committee. "I will have to think of something else. Just now I haven't the time for anything but directing the laying of the boardwalk. Have you heard anything lately from Mr. Caulk? Has he been talking in the store?"

The face of the clerk turned red. "Bettie Porter," she said in a whisper, "I wasn't going to tell you, but Mr. Caulk has been saying an awful thing in the store."

"Does he dare to tell people that I'm not honest?" cried the widow's daughter.

"It wasn't that," returned Katharine, speaking very slowly. "Bettie, he said that you ——"

"Well?" interrupted the Boardwalk Committee.

"He ought to be ashamed of himself," cried Katharine.

Bettie stared at her, waiting.

"He is looking horribly old lately," continued the public servant; "it may be that he's getting

childish. His saying that he'll shoot any man, black or white, who attempts to move the long horse-rack, certainly sounds as if he were getting childish."

Bettie laughed. "I can't be so charitable," she declared. "Mr. Caulk is not childish ; but I am quite resigned, my dear Katharine, to remain in ignorance of that awful something he has been saying about my mother's daughter in the store."

The public servant, however, had made up her mind to tell. "You ought to know," she said firmly, "for some people are mean enough to believe anything. Tom Gregory might believe it."

"What has Tom Gregory to do about the matter?" questioned Bettie, sharply. "Katharine Dobson, I don't want you to go on with the telling."

But the disregarding clerk went on in these words: "He says that you have thrown Tom Gregory over for Peter Savage."

Bettie Porter was so astonished at this that her pretty mouth fell open ; then her gray eyes filled with indignation and by and by her whole face was scornful.

"Oh, the coward!" she cried, "the ignoble, miserable coward!"

"Of course people with good sense know that such a thing is utterly preposterous," declared the post-office clerk. Yet she had said a minute before that Tom Gregory might believe it.

Yes, Tom Gregory might believe it.

The widow's daughter did not tarry long in the post-office after her denunciation of the Hollow's rich man. The wind blew her little cape back from her shoulders as she went rapidly up the hill. She felt as if all the people were discussing her private matters. What would be said about her next? It seemed to her for a little while that she could never again visit the Primrose post-office. Katharine Dobson would tell her the store talk and the shop talk of the station repeated in the post-office; she would hear every foolish thing that was said about her. It was impossible to become a public character even in a place as small as Primrose without having the private character attacked. It was truly ridiculous when the public character was a girl, a girl who had lived so very quietly in that long, lean house on the Hollow hill, a girl who, until

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she was nineteen years of age, had gone tamely along in the manner that Primrose admired, who had darned stockings and made her own everyday dresses, who knew how to cook and to house-clean.

"I should have walked in the Primrose mud for a year longer," mused the Boardwalk Committee, and her thoughts were contemptuous of the whole of her little world. "I should have picked my way up hill and down hill and along the level for another year, and then I should have driven over from the farm and helped to cut up the side walk by trying to keep one wheel at least out of the mud. I should have fastened an old skirt over my Sunday frock and jumped into a mud-hole in Primrose Hollow, and these people would have smiled on me and been pleased with me. However, I have attempted to lift everybody, yes, everybody, above the mud, and I am assailed. Well," she added, turning and gazing thoughtfully down the hill, "the people's foolish talk isn't going to hurt the boardwalk, but I do wish the steps weren't there."

CHAPTER XXII

STEPS AND OTHER THINGS

THE steps in question, while fully satisfying their maker, Peter Savage, were bothering some one besides Bettie Porter. Old man Holt looked out at them sadly from a window belonging to a house in the row said to be owned, together with furniture and tenants, by Mr. Stephen Caulk. Old man Holt was not a renter; he was only the father-in-law of a renter. Once upon a time he had been a carpenter, a first-rate workman, people said, but he had had a fall and ever since he had walked on crutches. His busy brain planned and dreamed, but his hands were folded and his crutches mocked the plans and the dreams. Old man Holt could not see all the steps, but he had heard of the others and he sighed over the whole.

Old man Holt had also heard that the board-walk was not to run before the row of houses and that the long horse-rack wasn't to be moved, and these things, too, worried him. Previous to

his fall, he had worked at the widow's. When he first came to Primrose with his son-in-law he had offered to paint the widow's house, although by trade he was a carpenter; the widow's house needed painting so very badly. He would have further undertaken the job of stopping up the knot-holes. That was long ago, when the girl was a child, and he marveled that the house was still unpainted and the knot-holes still uncovered for the girl, who was then only a child, had declared that both jobs ought to be attended to.

"She has a fine head on her shoulders, has the widow's daughter," said old man Holt, staring harder than ever out the window, "a very fine head indeed, but it's a pity that she hasn't a better carpenter."

"The boardwalk looks pretty fair according to my notion," said the man of the house, "and if Caulk would keep his finger out the pie it's likely that the widow's daughter would carry the thing through even to the paying of her debts."

"She'll pay her debts all right," said the old man. "I'm not troubled about that; but if I could speak to her I'd advise her to make Savage do away with the steps."

"Don't say a word against Peter Savage to Better Porter for land's sakes, pa!" screamed the mistress of the house.

"Why not?" demanded the old carpenter.

"Because," said the young woman, her face one brilliant smile, "folks say that Bettie Porter is sweet on Peter Savage."

Old man Holt grabbed his two crutches and changed his seat for an armchair near the stove. The boardwalk talk was bewildering.

"What about Taum?" he asked.

"She give Taum the mitten long ago," was the answer. "Law, pa, it seems to me as if you never hear nothin'."

"I hear all that's told me," said the old man.

"Well," said the daughter conclusively, "the girl give Taum the mitten. Surely, pa," she added, "you seen Taum Gregory reelin' out the shop yonder? You're always at the window and the whole town was bright the night of the entertainment."

"I seen nothing," asserted old man Holt.

"He come a-reelin' out anyways," concluded the daughter. "It was Bettie Porter carryin' on with this here boardwalk business that drove him

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to drink, and now folks is sayin' that cards 'll soon be out for the other feller's weddin'."

Old man Holt thumped his crutches upon the floor. "That isn't true," he thundered. "People are telling lies on the girl."

"Well, I can't help it any," said Mrs. Payne, resignedly, "talk's talk and it will git round."

Peter Savage had completed the boardwalk from its beginning, opposite the widow's gate, to the long horse-rack, dipping down here and there with an objectionable step; he had completed the boardwalk from the lawyer's residence to the row of houses and he had begun to lay the boards on the ties that were to join the ties of Mr. Rider's proposed boardwalk. Peter Savage carried on hilarious conversations with the passing samaritans, for every man on foot or horseback was willing to pause by the wayside and help. But Peter accepted no suggestions. "I know what I'm about," he cried out cheerily, more than a dozen times a day. "I want to be bounced if I don't understand how to build a boardwalk. I'll stake my life on it that when I'm through everybody in the Hollow is going to

be pretty well satisfied with the Hollow's boardwalk."

The cheery carpenter, however, grew weary of working on that strip of walk destined to join Mr. Rider's promised strip. His roving glance took in the distant view and lingered first upon the space before the row of houses and next upon that abrupt and unintended termination of boards at the long horse-rack. He was working on an off-shoot, his glance took in the boardwalk proper. A man ought to finish the boardwalk proper and then work upon an off-shoot. Peter appeared at the widow's one night and asked to see Miss Bettie.

"The boardwalk has got to be laid before the old gentleman's houses, Miss Bettie," he said, "if the work's to look anyways decent."

"But Mr. Caulk won't let us put it there," said Bettie, helplessly.

"Nothing venture, nothing have," said Peter, in quite the spirit of the whilom Boardwalk Committee. "You agree to my laying a few ties and we'll see what the old feller does."

"No," said Bettie, shaking her head at the

same time. "It may be that after awhile Mr. Caulk will fill up the space with a boardwalk of his own."

"Well, then," said Peter, smiling broadly, "I'm ready to tackle the long horse-rack."

"It has to be moved, of course," said the widow's daughter, "and if it belongs to anybody it belongs to Mr. Weever. If Mr. Weever says we can move it, move it we will, but," she added, gravely, "Mr. Caulk has threatened to shoot any man who begins to work at the first post."

Peter Savage laughed, bowed and said, with a flourish of his hands, "All right, Miss Bettie, I reckon I'm to be shot to-morrow morning."

Mr. Weever saw no reason in the world why the long horse-rack shouldn't be moved far enough away from the bank to allow the boardwalk to be laid behind it. He declared, now with a burst of laughter and again with a solemn countenance, that old man Caulk had no rights whatever in the long horse-rack. "He has a vile temper, Caulk has," said the storekeeper, "but he's not going to commit any unlawful act. We don't have shooting affrays in Primrose Hollow. The old man is blustering, that's all."

Bettie was relieved. She didn't want Peter Savage's life to be endangered.

The men in the stores appreciated her feelings.

"Savage ain't as high in the world as the widow and her daughter," said the men in the stores, "but he's a pretty good-looking fellow, as Miss Bettie has discovered. No, indeed, the young lady ain't willing for him to lose his life nor an arm nor a leg in the interest of the Hollow's boardwalk. I reckon she's been wishing she'd engaged another man to work on the dangerous parts."

Old Mr. Caulk did not even shoot in the air when Peter Savage, together with the aid of his helper, began uprooting the first post. He did not shoot when all the posts were uprooted nor when they occupied a new site four feet away from the bank; but on the morning that the boardwalk showed itself new and bright behind the horse-rack, according to the news in the post-office, old man Caulk had a fit at the dinner table.

"Yes, indeed," explained Katharine, "his housekeeper was frightened nearly to death; I don't know whether he merely fell back in his

chair or if he fell altogether out of it to the floor, anyway he had a fit, and the people declare it is your fault, Bettie Porter."

"My fault? Oh, of course!" cried Bettie, indignantly. "If he should happen to die the people would say it is my fault."

Stephen Caulk was confined to his home, to his bed in fact, like the magistrate, and everywhere there was talk.

"Yes," said the Hollow people, and the people all about the Hollow, "yes, old man Caulk fell in a fit at the dinner table. This here boardwalk business is liable to put an end to old man Caulk. If the magistrate wasn't down ill, long ago old man Caulk would have put an end to the boardwalk business and the widow's daughter wouldn't be flying around the Hollow with her head in the air. Let a girl begin a thing and she don't know when to finish it. Enough's enough. Old man Caulk ain't an angel, but he's a pretty prominent individual, and he ain't used to being flustered and frustrated by a girl."

"The girl's laying the boardwalk all right," said Mr. Dave Palmer.

"She's laying the boardwalk to be sure, but

she's up to her ears in debt," remarked the station agent. "Who's going to pay for the boardwalk?"

Then a youth bowed around to the gentlemen in the waiting-room and sang out the following rhyme to an impromptu tune:

"We ladies say we'll build a walk,
A noble walk and true,
To give the money, gentlemen,
Is all we ask of you."

"That's some of Miss Bettie's own composing, I take it," remarked Jim Hazelton. "She's got a lot of gall. Now, if the matter had been properly arranged; if in the beginning she'd called a meeting of gentlemen, why, then, the Hollow might have got its boardwalk." Hazelton's roving glance fell upon the boardwalk glistening in the sun, and he proceeded doggedly, "I mean that the Hollow might have got a boardwalk that was paid for."

"I'm thinking," said Dave Palmer, "that if, on the contrary, the Union Church society had gone ahead and raised the church building, the time would have come when the Union Church would have been paid for; I'm thinking that if

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the schoolhouse people had run up the school building the time would have arrived when the Hollow would have been in possession of a schoolhouse that was paid for."

"A town that can't afford a church building can't afford a boardwalk," declared Hazelton. "A town that can't afford a schoolhouse can't come anyways near affording a boardwalk."

"But it looks like as if it might afford all three of the improvements," said Dave Palmer, seriously, scratching his head. "Primrose Hollow is about the most cantankerous little settlement on the face of the earth. The majority of the folks are perpetually fighting against their own good."

Jim Hazelton rose, pulled his hat over his eyes and went out the waiting-room, whistling.

"The majority of the Hollow folks haven't ever learned how to listen to reason straight through," said Mr. Palmer, still scratching his head.

Then the father of Sarah Hobbs said his say in these words: "No girl has a right to refuse a man's bid."

"If there's reason in it, she's got a right,"

said Dave Palmer. "I've come to that conclusion."

Then other voices in the waiting-room gave vent to dissatisfaction in such sentences as these :

"If the boards had been laid lengthwise there'd been a clean saving of thirty or forty dollars."

"Miss Bettie Porter isn't caring about any clean saving of thirty or forty dollars. She's got money to burn. I never seen a girl so headstrong. That oyster supper was a clear let-in to the secret that things wasn't fair and square with the committee."

"What did she mean by shipping back the oysters? Why didn't she hold the supper on the following night?"

"She'd had the supper without the oysters, what did she want with the oysters? It takes a girl to do a slick business in Primrose. If Caulk ever succeeds in getting the widow's daughter before the magistrate the trial will be a show one."

"When a girl goes into a public business I declare to goodness, she hasn't the remotest idea when to finish it."

"Miss Bettie Porter isn't going to finish a thing until it's done," thundered Mr. Palmer. "That's the time to finish a thing, gentlemen, when it's done."

"When it's done paid for, yes," said the station agent.

"When it's done and paid for, yes," corrected Mr. Palmer.

Here the night operator put a question.

"What's she doing now to pay for it?" he asked.

"Nothing," answered half a dozen voices in unison.

"The Hollow is the most cantakerous settlement on the face of the earth," repeated Dave Palmer. "When the girl is giving you a rest you're quarreling for to be stirred up, and when she's stirring you up you're quarreling for a rest."

But even while the widow's daughter was exceedingly busy overlooking the tearing down and reërection of the long horse-rack,—anxiously watching to see if the boards would be sufficient for the whole of the walk; even while she was buying nails from every merchant in Primrose

and having them credited to the Boardwalk Committee, which in the eyes of every one was a thing that had been and wasn't; even in the midst of her perplexities over the steps that Peter Savage vowed could not be remedied, she, urged on by the entreaties of Katharine Dobson, turned her attention to the replenishing of the impoverished treasury.

Now Bettie Porter was not a friend of raffles. She did not believe in people giving money and getting nothing in return, but, urged on by Katharine, she argued that in the case of the boardwalk the people were getting a good deal, nothing less, in fact, than the boardwalk itself, and so, an album, donated by the girl's mother, also a non-friend to ordinary raffles, was advertised widely by two little Primrose girls in possession of chance books and pencils. Bettie was wiser than she knew in her selection of the two little girls, promising a large wax doll to the one who secured the larger number of chances. The one little girl was Sue Rider's cousin, Hilda Rawlston, who had recently been adopted by her aunt. She had proposed her and the little girl was delighted, though Uncle Rider said she had

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better let the thing alone. The Boardwalk Committee, as aforesaid, was politely and generously buying nails on credit from all the Primrose merchants and Mr. Rider was on handshaking terms with all his customers; besides, although he wouldn't have openly avowed it, Sue's father was beginning to take a keen interest in the whole of the Hollow's big improvement. Therefore, little Hilda, already acquainted with everybody, and whose curls were very attractive, smilingly kept possession of her pencil and her book and complacently established herself in the door of her uncle's store, prepared to attack every customer who entered the store and every man, woman or child who passed along the Primrose road.

The other little girl who was given a book and pencil was Gertie Brown. Gertie lived along the Hollow road beyond the terminus of the boardwalk; she lived in a very diminutive house and her father was a laboring man.

Gertie wanted the doll very much. She felt honored in the possession of the book and the pencil. She intended to capture all the people who traveled by her father's gate.

At first the little girls and the little books and the pencils excited a little curiosity, Primrose Hollow, being lucky enough not to have had much to do with raffles. The album was put on show in the window of the dressmaker's; it was very beautiful and some one would get it for ten cents. After awhile, however, the little curiosity was replaced by intense excitement. The people of the Hollow took it into their heads that the two little girls were running a race and the people in the Hollow and about it began to take sides. Mr. Weever at the cash store eagerly demanded chances for the book for Gertie Brown. All of Gertie's friends eagerly responded and all of Mr. Rider's enemies were generous with their silver. On the other hand, Mr. Rider was in full swing working for the boardwalk in the interest of Mrs. Rider's pretty little niece; he was not going to permit Gertie Brown to get ahead of Hilda Rawlston and consequently the money came pouring in from every direction and the girls who had once formed the committee and who were at present heart members of the committee, wished heartily that they were openly an indissoluble band.

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"The people are having a regular battle over Hilda Rawlston and Gertie Brown," cried the flighty servant of Uncle Sam, clapping her hands enthusiastically. "Isn't it delightful?"

"I don't think so," said Bettie. "If I had known the people were going to act so foolishly I would never have started a raffle."

The clerk's mouth fell open. "You are the queerest girl," she said at last.

"It's outrageous," declared Bettie, "outrageous! Katharine Dobson, I am having trouble all round."

She seated herself upon the post-office bench as she spoke and she looked so sad, almost melancholy, that the clerk was disturbed. Nevertheless, if Bettie's other troubles corresponded to the trouble over the triumphantly progressive raffle she, Katharine Dobson, couldn't very well sympathize with her.

"We need money, you know," said the clerk, gently. "Bettie Porter, I don't care if I have paid my fine you can count me back on the committee."

Bettie smiled faintly. "You'll leave again on the recovery of Mr. Caulk and the magistrate," she said.

"I won't," declared the clerk.

"You'll leave if we don't prosper."

"I won't. Besides, since the boardwalk is almost completed and money is coming in so rapidly I see no reason why things will not continue to flourish. Bettie, the two factions are hot. I hear all the talk here in the office."

"It's horrible," groaned Bettie.

"Well, you can't stop it," said the clerk, resignedly. "What about the other trouble?"

"Peter Savage has gone off without finishing the boardwalk."

"He has! Where? Why?" demanded Katharine.

"I can't answer all your questions," returned the widow's daughter; "I wish I could. I simply know that he left Primrose late last night, leaving a message at the blacksmith's shop that he had accepted a contract from somebody or other for the building of a barn and was obliged to begin the work this morning."

"That was a queer way to act, certainly," said the clerk.

The two girls were still puzzling their brains

over Peter Savage's abrupt action when the afternoon mail arrived.

Uncle Sam's servant was brisk and the afternoon mail was generally light. But light as was this afternoon mail it was interesting, for it contained a letter addressed in big bold handwriting to the Boardwalk Committee of Primrose Hollow.

"Look," said Katharine, thrusting the letter through the professional window to her friend. "Who in the world is writing to us, Bettie Porter?"

"Oh!" said Bettie, with a gasp, "I suppose it explains everything. It's from Peter Savage, of course."

CHAPTER XXIII

PETER SAVAGE'S BILL

BETTIE PORTER opened Peter's letter, read it, turned pale and looked up with another gasp.

"Well?" queried the post-office clerk.

"It's a bill," said the widow's daughter.

In an instant Katharine was out of her cage, sitting beside her friend on the post-office bench. Instinctively her arm stole around Bettie's slender waist.

"I need support and consolation and everything else," declared Bettie, laughing faintly. "Here, Katharine, look at it for yourself, 'lave in it, drink of it then if you can.'"

The public servant gave the bill her undivided attention. "Bettie Porter," she exclaimed, "I wouldn't pay it."

"Wouldn't pay it?" repeated Bettie.

"The man has not fulfilled his contract," said the clerk.

This was true. Peter referred to it in the let-

ter accompanying his bill. He apologized, and his written words like his words spoken, were urbane and cheerful. He recommended a certain carpenter to fill his place and wished hearty success and everlasting joy to the Boardwalk Committee.

But while Peter's letter was right short and to the point, Peter's bill was lengthy and complicated. He charged for everything, for the putting up and tearing down and re-putting up of the stage in the old warehouse, for the moving of the stove, for the borrowed coal, for tending the fire, for riding about to the sawmills, etc., etc.

"Why," said the post-office clerk, forlornly, "he hasn't charged for grandfather's horse that time it wasn't lent, is a mystery to me."

People who met the widow's daughter en route up the hill that afternoon said that they never had seen a girl walk so rapidly, never in all their born days. "And she carries her head in the air like her mother, the widow," said the people, "though everybody knows that the Porters are mortal poor."

With her proud head on the pillow and her

proud body prone on her little white bed, the proud widow's daughter summed up all the noble things that she had done for the Hollow people and moaned over her multitudinous labors and her sufferings while she wet the pillow with her tears.

"That fire in the warehouse stove saved a man from freezing during the blizzard," sobbed the girl, with a final summing up of all the noble things. Then she sat upright on the bed, pushing back her hair. Across the room was her bureau, its mirror, surrounded by a roll of soft whiteness, arranged in strict accordance with an article in a Ladies' Home Magazine for the purpose of seeing oneself as one really is. The soft whiteness in this particular instance surrounded a flushed face, a tremulous mouth, a pair of wistful eyes. Bettie Porter wished good to all the world, especially to Primrose Hollow; she loved the whole world, especially Primrose Hollow. She had been light of heart when she undertook the building of a boardwalk for the little town. She had not for a moment dreamed of the consequences, except that consequence, the boardwalk. She had been surprised when Tom Gregory, in

the words of the Hollow gossip, "set his foot against the boardwalk." His growing opposition, his foolish arguments, repeated second-hand, had pained and annoyed her, but she had pushed ahead, trying not to mind. Now, the little insignificant world of Primrose Hollow, while she still loved it, was crying out that the "widow's daughter had jilted Taum." The little insignificant world knew nothing of that letter she had read in the old warehouse in which she was peremptorily ordered to let one of the two things go; and the one thing was Tom Gregory and the other was a boardwalk for Primrose Hollow. She had let Tom Gregory go for the boardwalk and what had she gained? The boardwalk? She said, "Yes," humbly, covering her face with her hands as she said it. She and her mother would continue to live on in the old homestead, all in all to each other; that was sweet enough. She looked at the girl in the glass and the girl in the glass looked back at her from under disheveled locks and they told each other again in a single voice that that was sweet enough. But the widow was not young. In the natural course of events some day that girl in the glass would

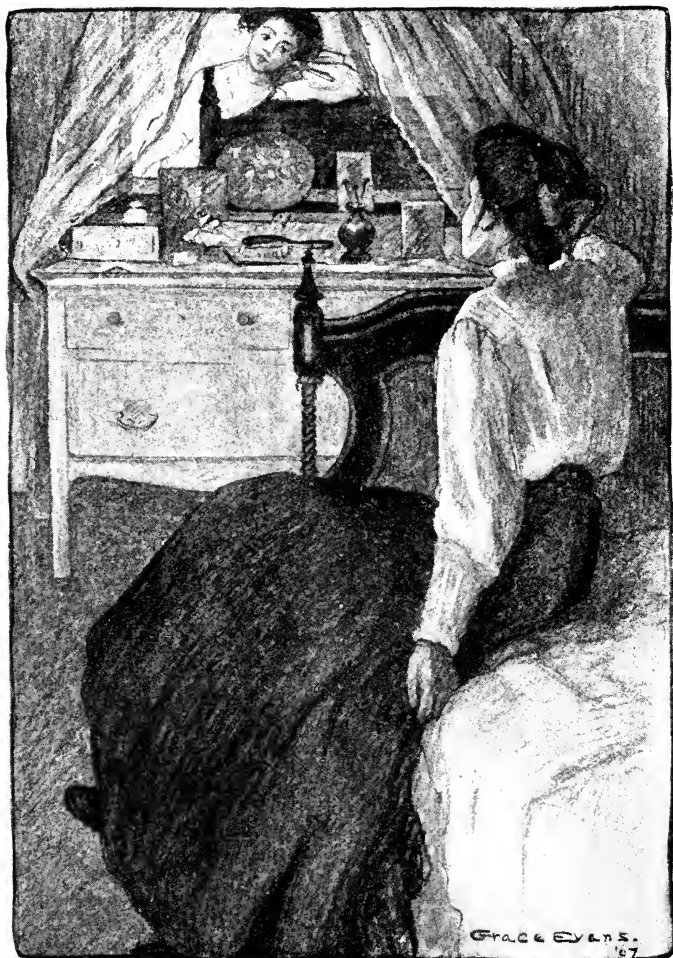
be alone. She would live in the old homestead with her maid-servant and her cows and her chickens, renting her farm as the widow had done before her. Day after day, year after year she would see the teams passing the gate on their way to the station, even in a little while, for years go rapidly, she would probably hear a boy's voice calling to his horse, and the boy's voice would be familiar; it would be the voice of another Tom Gregory, who drove his father's milk wagon. Sometimes Tom's sisters and brothers would pile into the wagon with the cans. They would be a jolly company, but they would be nothing to her, nothing whatever to her. If down in the old warehouse after she had read that letter, she had turned about and said to Sarah Hobbs and the others, "There will be no entertainment; I have decided to give up trying to get a boardwalk for Primrose Hollow," everything would have been different. Tom Gregory would have come quickly enough to the girl, willing to be guided by her wishes; yes, and he would have acknowledged that he had been a little hard. She, perhaps, would have shed a few tears over her perfidy toward the boardwalk, while Tom

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smoothed her hair and patted her shoulder and laughed at her gigantic notions. Everybody, or at least almost everybody, would have been pleased. The majority of the people in Primrose had declared that there would never be a boardwalk in the Hollow, therefore they would have been pleased at its early frustration. Her mother, the widow, would have been pleased, for, although she staunchly took up for the Boardwalk Committee, took up for it vehemently when it was reduced to a single member, Bettie was well aware that she worried over the broken engagement.

However, when a person, man or woman, undertakes to do a thing, oughtn't that person to do it? Certainly, certainly.

Bettie Porter leaned forward against the foot of the bed. She had done nothing wrong. After she had undertaken to build a boardwalk for Primrose Hollow it would have been wrong to have given it up simply to please Tom Gregory and to insure her own future happiness. She had understood thoroughly and for a long time that the building of a boardwalk for the Hollow was not a little thing, as she had at first imagined,



THE GIRL IN THE GLASS TOLD HERSELF BRAVELY THAT SHE
WOULD NEVER BE SORRY FOR WHAT SHE HAD DONE.

and it was growing more and more gigantic. If she had given up a right thing for her own pleasure, she would not have deserved to live a happy, tranquil life. Later on she might have given up other things that were also right. A woman ought not to yield to petty whims; she should be respected as well as loved. That girl in the glass told herself bravely that she would never be sorry for what she had done. She would build the boardwalk and see that it was paid for; she would live on with her mother and continue to take an interest in the welfare of Primrose. Perhaps in the future she would head an energetic faction and rear a Union Church and afterward help with a schoolhouse. The schoolhouse erected, she might pass a school examination and settle down as a school-marm, and after that she would grow old peacefully, doing her duty to everybody, forgiving her enemies and loving them. Here Bettie went back to the pillow again and wept aloud.

"Bettie," said the widow, coming softly into the room, "my dear child, what is the matter?"

The matter really was Peter Savage's bill, but

Bettie had forgotten it. She did not answer, only sobbed more bitterly when she felt her mother's arm about her.

"Are you worrying over the debt on the boardwalk?" asked Mrs. Porter, speaking very tenderly. "Don't you know that your mother will help to see you through?"

A little sparrow, hopping complacently upon the window sill, paused for an instant and looked in. It almost seemed as if he understood the widow's offer and was wondering over it as well he might, for the sparrow lived in one of the knot holes belonging to the unpainted house.

Bettie seized her mother's hand and kissed it.

"Darling," said the widow, speaking very tenderly, "if he isn't worth your love, try to forget him."

This advice must have cost Mrs. Porter an effort, for while she wasn't worldly-wise, she did want to see Bettie riding in her carriage.

"It's the boardwalk, mother," said Bettie, faintly.

"Well, go ahead and finish it," said the widow, encouragingly, and one would have thought from her voice that she at least owned

the whole of the Hollow, "remembering always that your mother will see you through."

"Mother," said Bettie, and she rose and sitting beside the widow, put her arms about her, "the boardwalk is not to be built with Bettie Porter's tears and her mother's money. I haven't time to cry anyway, I've got to think."

The girl was thinking when her mother came to her again, thinking comfortably after a refreshing bath.

"Katharine Dobson is in the parlor," said the widow. "My dear, shall I tell her to come up? I'm afraid it's something about the boardwalk."

"Of course it's something about the boardwalk," said Bettie, "nothing else would bring Katharine from the office. I can stand it. I am quite well, mother," she added, with a little laugh. "I'll go to the parlor."

"Bettie Porter," cried Uncle Sam's employee, rushing to meet her friend, "you surely haven't decided to pay Peter Savage's bill?"

"I haven't given the matter full consideration," answered Bettie.

"I am afraid there is going to be an awful

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fuss in Primrose Hollow," continued the clerk, "a terrible fuss."

"What about?"

"Why about the boardwalk."

"Oh!" said Bettie.

"What else could a fuss in Primrose Hollow be about, if it wasn't about the boardwalk?" asked the clerk.

"Who is going to make the fuss?" asked Bettie in turn, "and what is the excuse?"

"I cannot answer such deep questions," said the clerk, settling herself upon the parlor sofa, "I can only tell you what I have seen. All the people in the Hollow are frightened. Mr. Weever is scared to death. Bettie Porter, I won't be surprised if we have a lawsuit in the end."

Bettie paled a little. "Has the magistrate recovered?" she asked.

"I don't know," repeated Katharine, "I can only tell you what I have seen. No indeed, a lawsuit will not be a surprise to me."

Then Bettie spoke out in her own defense.

"I have given up my days working in the interest of the boardwalk," she said; "I have

dreamed about the thing; I nearly froze getting home that night of the first oyster supper. I have made sacrifices ——”

“I know you have,” agreed the clerk, warmly, “but people are so mean. What do they care for your trouble and your sacrifices? They will walk on the boardwalk and sue you for it.”

This was mysterious, but the widow's daughter hadn't finished about herself.

“What have I received in return?” she questioned dramatically. “I have been cruelly slandered; I have been called dishonest, bold, unladylike. Worse things have been said of me. Katharine Dobson, you know that I am honest, that I am not bold or unladylike.”

“Everybody knows it,” declared the clerk, “but some people love to fuss.”

“Let them fuss,” cried Bettie, throwing back her head; “I can stand it.”

“It is the fault of Peter Savage that there is going to be fresh trouble in Primrose Hollow. Bettie Porter, if I were you, I would never pay that unreasonable bill.” The clerk's face grew more and more grave as she spoke, and her eyes flashed fire.

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"I think I will pay the bill," said Bettie. "No one shall ever have reason to call me dishonest."

"Yet if anything happens it will be all Peter Savage's fault," said the clerk.

"Has Peter Savage returned to Primrose?" asked Bettie.

"Not he," said the clerk, sarcastically; "he's safe enough. Oh, I wish they'd found him working on the boardwalk. Bettie, if there's a trial or anything, you insist upon the presence of that despicable fellow."

"I wish you'd tell me what's the matter," said Bettie, now thoroughly alarmed. "I don't understand about wanting Peter Savage at the trial."

"All the girls are furious," declared Katharine. "I think every one will be willing to pay a fine to be taken back on the committee."

"Katharine Dobson," said Bettie, in a whisper, "Mr. Caulk isn't going to have me summoned to Wainsborough? I can't go; indeed I can't go. I've never had anything to do with a trial."

"They have to serve a summons on you," said the clerk, solemnly. "If they can't find you, they can't serve a summons on you. Bettie Porter, you hide."

"Then," said Bettie, hoarsely, "it is a summons?"

"I don't know," answered Katharine, "what I have seen is this: Mr. Andrews got off the train at the station and Mr. Caulk met him. The two of them have been in the old warehouse for half an hour, and Peter Savage never put back the partition as he promised. Those two miserable men are in there now and there's the stage and the trimmings and the stove. Bettie, something ought to be done to Peter Savage."

"If I'm summoned to Wainsborough, I can't go," repeated Bettie.

Bettie Porter was expecting all sorts of things to happen to her on the following morning, but she went bravely out into the road and bravely down the hill, and bravely into the post-office. However, she looked carefully ahead as she walked, except now and then when she turned to look behind, for, notwithstanding her prodigious bravery it was the girl's intention to run in case she beheld anything in the shape of a man appearing to bear a summons.

"Mr. Andrews returned to Wainsborough on the evening train," said Katharine, at which news

the widow's daughter breathed a little freely, "and Mr. Caulk has said nothing about anything in the stores or anywhere else. I'm afraid that the two men are hatching some miserable plot that will ruin the boardwalk."

"If it isn't already ruined by those horrid steps," said Bettie. "I almost fell awhile ago. Last night the doctor did fall. They'll have to be taken away."

"By whom?" demanded Katharine.

The clerk was surprised at Bettie's answer. "By Mr. Holt."

"Mr. Holt!" cried the clerk. "He's lame."

"I want to utilize his brains," said the widow's daughter, "a colored man can do the work."

When Miss Porter arrived in the home of old Mr. Holt's son-in-law and petitioned the ex-carpenter to accept the job of doing away with Peter Savage's steps, the ex-carpenter was delighted. He did not pause to remember that he was living in one of Mr. Caulk's houses before which there was to be no boardwalk whatever, he was all eager excitement over the prospect of again working at his trade, and at the idea of rectifying the dangerous and ill-looking steps.

"Yes, indeed, Miss Bettie," he said, "I can get along with a colored man as laborer. I'll begin at once."

Primrose Hollow was electrified when old man Holt appeared, limping along the side of the walk, electrified when the colored laborer, following old man Holt's directions went to work heaving up certain portions of the boardwalk in the vicinity of the steps.

"What's she doing now?" was a universal question.

The answer was given in practical illustration.

Then followed other questions: What would Stephen Caulk have to say to old man Holt overseeing the repairing of the boardwalk? Would he permit a man working on the boardwalk to continue to live in one of the houses belonging to the row that he owned, together with furniture and inhabitants? If old Holt dared to lay the walk behind the long horse-rack would he also dare to lay his head on a pillow owned by Stephen Caulk?

"Holt will have to go to the poor-house 'gainst he's through with fixing the boardwalk," such was said in the stores and the shops and in

the station in all earnestness and all pity. Holt was doing the work well, there was no doubt of it. The steps removed and gentle inclines, scarcely perceptible, introduced in their stead, made a wonderful improvement in the appearance of the walk. The Hollow people began to look at the boardwalk with pride in its possession, began to walk upon it with a sense of something substantial and valuable underfoot.

While Bettie Porter kept herself in readiness to run from any man who might probably carry a summons, old man Caulk still kept quiet as to his intentions and the magistrate still magnanimously remained in bed.

But although the rich man of the Hollow kept quiet, his keen little eyes followed with fascinated interest the movements of the ex-carpenter. Mr. Caulk also began to note the effect of that non-existing walk before the row of houses. Now the one row of houses in Primrose was in the eyes of the owner by no means an insignificant thing. He loved that row of houses as he loved his other possessions, and he desired it to show up well in the hollow of Primrose.

CHAPTER XXIV

A POLITICAL PICNIC

THE spring-time dawned upon the Hollow, the magistrate had got upon his legs, and still Stephen Caulk neglected seeing to that threatened summons. Mr. Caulk's friends, or, perhaps, the enemies of the boardwalk, declared that the old gentleman had aged considerably, that the widow's daughter was greatly to blame for refusing the lowest bid and that, as things stood, the girl had been cheated ; she had paid a fancy price for the lumber.

In the spring-time Girard West became clamorous for his money.

"I borrowed the money to pay Peter Savage and old Mr. Holt," said Bettie, "but I cannot ask mother to lend me over a hundred dollars in order that I may pay Mr. West. He doesn't need the money and he promised to wait."

"You should have put into the bargain that he'd have to wait until the boardwalk is finished," said the clerk. "Bettie," she added mysteriously,

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"some people say for a fact that Mr. Caulk's mind is weakening."

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Bettie. "I don't want a charge like that laid at my door."

"What did he mean by showing Mr. Andrews through the warehouse?" asked the clerk.

"I thought," returned the widow's daughter, "that it was Mr. Andrews who showed Mr. Caulk through the warehouse."

"So it was, of course," acquiesced the flighty creature in fresh alarm, "and neither of them, as far as we know, have ever done a thing."

"As far as we know," repeated Bettie.

"Mr. Caulk speaks to you, doesn't he?" asked the clerk.

"I don't know whether he would speak to me or not," Bettie answered. "The truth is we never get near enough to exchange salutations. I have borne a good deal in the interests of the boardwalk; I am willing to bear even more, if necessary, so that I succeed in getting the boardwalk—all of it—I will be satisfied."

"You are exactly like Shepard," said Katharine, admiringly.

"I don't know," said the widow's daughter,

meekly. In her heart Bettie Porter was almost sure that Mr. Shepard had never been called upon to make sacrifices similar to her own. Mr. Shepard had been maligned, but she had been maligned in a meaner fashion. She had not heard that Boss Shepard's nearest and dearest friend had gone back on him; it was only the people of Washington.

"I don't know," she repeated, still more meekly; "Mr. Shepard was a wonderful man."

"Bettie," said the clerk, after a little pause, "the Primrose people have had a good long rest. Why don't you start in begging them again?"

"For bread and butter and meat and all things sweet? I am going to," returned Bettie.

The clerk was alarmed. "O Bettie Porter!" she exclaimed, "you don't mean to attempt another oyster supper?"

"It will be a good time for a Hollow oyster supper," answered Bettie, smiling dryly. "There is no 'r' in the month and consequently the people would expect no oysters. Do you think we can look for goodly contributions of chicken and ham and biscuits and jellies and pickles for the oyster supper in May?"

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"I think," said the clerk, very soberly, "that nobody will give a thing and that nobody will come. There are five plates in my possession, Bettie Porter, that not a soul will own, and I don't know what to do with them."

"Give them to the poor," said Bettie, easily.

"We can never again ask for donations for any kind of a supper," said the clerk, speaking with decision.

"Don't be too sure," said the Boardwalk Committee. "In fact, a supper is next on the boardwalk program, a supper in our front yard."

"Oh!" cried the clerk. "What kind of a supper?"

"A political supper," answered Bettie.

"Are you ready to swear that the ice-cream saucers will be washed?" asked Uncle Sam's servant.

"Put up on a tree, if necessary, 'We all have eaten our peck of dirt, so don't be afraid,'" answered the Boardwalk Committee.

Now, if Primrose Hollow loved a show, and that it did dearly love a show has been proved, it also loved a political gathering. The people who kept rigorously apart for religious and social rea-

sons, adhering to business principles and for numerous minor necessitous causes, were willing enough to meet in the welfare of politics. That the widow's daughter would dream of such a thing as a political picnic, for a political picnic the festival to be given in the widow's yard began to be called, was a surprise to the whole neighborhood.

People who would readily enough and in a scornful manner have refused donations for another oyster supper in the Hollow given by that dissolved company, the Boardwalk Committee, were totally unable to refuse a basket for a political picnic, even though the Boardwalk Committee, reduced to Bettie Porter, with "Katharine Dobson trying to hang on," originated the plan and proposed to carry it through in the interests of the boardwalk; even though the donation of the baskets looked as if every man and woman in the region of the Hollow abetted the boardwalk movement, which they didn't and never would, with a few exceptions, of course.

The spirit of the coming political picnic took such absolute possession of the people that a

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week or so prior to the important event, which event had been announced in a Wainsborough paper and declared, flatteringly, to be the latest fruitful idea of that energetic company, the Boardwalk Committee, that four girls walked up the hill leading to the long, lean house and turned in at the widow's gate.

The four girls wished to see Bettie at once. They waited for her in the yard.

"Bettie," declared the girls, when the widow's daughter made her appearance, "we have all come back."

"After your fines?" asked Bettie, laughing.

"No, never!" cried the four voices.

"We are willing to pay a second fine to be taken back," said Elizabeth Tarr. "Bettie Porter, how in the world did you come to think of a political picnic? Everybody about Primrose is wild over politics."

"That is how I came to think of a political picnic," answered Bettie, demurely.

"Are you going to decorate the grounds?" inquired Mary Harley. "Father says the grounds ought to be decorated. He is willing to donate the magic lanterns."

"If you have all come back," said Bettie, "it is for the committee to decide, not for me."

"Papa says he will donate the strawberries," said Sue Rider.

"Everybody is coming," cried Katharine. "I know it from the talk in the post-office."

"The candidates from both sides will be present," said Sue Rider, rapturously. "Bettie Porter, you are the smartest girl in the whole world."

"For the sake of the whole world, I sincerely hope not," said Bettie, but she was very, very thankful that her brains had been sharp enough to suggest a political picnic.

Candidates, as every one is aware, are the most genial and generous gentlemen on the face of the earth. The candidates would fill the widow's yard. The candidates would walk up the boardwalk to the political picnic. The Hollow people felt fresh interest and satisfaction in the boardwalk that was laid and a tide of public resentment went out toward Stephen Caulk. Why didn't Stephen Caulk allow the boardwalk to be laid in front of his row of houses or lay it himself? Mr. Rider, like a man, had put his down in a jiffy.

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"The candidates," said the Hollow people, "will think that we've got a slip-shod way of laying a boardwalk."

A lately re-admitted member of the committee was of the opinion that Mr. Caulk ought to be run out of the town.

"Say, rather, that we, the Boardwalk Committee of Primrose Hollow, ought to appeal to him in a body," suggested Sue Rider. "It's a shame if that old man is going to be allowed to ruin the looks of the place."

"Bettie Porter," inquired Elizabeth Tarr, "are you willing that we appeal in a body to Mr. Caulk?"

"No," said Bettie, "I'm not."

"Bettie has been threatened with a summons," said Katharine. "The rest of us haven't. Suppose the rest of us do it?"

"But the president must agree to the action," said Sue. "Bettie," she added persuasively, "don't you agree?"

"No," said the president, flushing, "I don't."

"Then," said the lawyer's daughter, "let me tell you, the candidates are going to have a

mighty poor opinion of the boardwalk of Primrose Hollow."

"We are not building the boardwalk for the candidates," said Bettie.

"We are only asking the candidates to help pay for it, that is all," said the post-office clerk, with a laugh.

"That is all," said the president.

CHAPTER XXV

TOM HEARS THE LATEST HOLLOW NEWS

CANDIDATES are gentlemen, surely. Every person who attended the political picnic in the widow's yard had this truism forced upon him. The picnic was prominently successful; it could not be otherwise. Political consultations, a plentiful repast and all those handshakes for the sum of twenty-five cents! Cheap enough? It was too cheap. The people who attended the political picnic very willingly, therefore, carried away mementos from the fancy table, the women and the men of the Primrose neighborhood smilingly packing their capacious buggy boxes with sofa cushions and tidies and dolls and all sorts, and conditions of things that had been contributed with equal generosity to that wonderful, enticing and delightful political picnic.

It is true there was considerable disturbance on the grounds at the beginning of proceedings, caused by nothing more nor less than the widow's daughter presenting Hilda Rawlston and Gertie

Brown each with a doll. Even after the president of the Boardwalk Committee had taken in the books, dimes had poured in upon her through the agency of the two little girls. "Don't forget to keep strict account, Miss Bettie," each little girl had said, "everybody wants me to be first." And Bettie Porter had thrown this obligation from her. She had patted the heads of the little girls as she presented the two dolls and had said gently and pleasantly, "I don't know which was ahead, I lost the count, but that doesn't matter, both of you did remarkably well."

"Papa will be furious," confided Sue Rider, criticising Bettie's action with her arm encircling Mary Harley's waist.

"So will the others," said Mary Harley; "the Hollow people are so excitable. However, they all seem to be enjoying themselves to-day."

Miss Harley was right. Primrose Hollow was in its glory. The magic lanterns were going out before the crowd departed.

"Tom was there," remarked Dave Palmer, thoughtfully scratching his head. Mr. Palmer spoke to a neighbor as the two of them jogged homeward along the Primrose road. "Yes, Tom

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was there. I seen him sneak out and I kind of felt sorry for him. There was the girl in her white frock and ribbons, tall and straight and triumphant, and there was as big a gathering as was ever witnessed in the Hollow, and there down the hill and stretching out of sight was the boardwalk. Why a fellow that could have taken hold of that girl's hands and whispered something sweet to her, would have been the happiest fellow on the grounds, but Tom, he just sneaked in and shook hands with the candidates and sneaked out, the whole of the boardwalk laying lengthwise between him and the girl."

"Taum didn't calculate that the boardwalk would prosper, I take it," said the farmer's friend. "Taum, he's got a hot head like the old man before him. I'm some'at troubled about Taum."

"Tom's proud and the girl's proud," said Mr. Palmer, "and I tell you right here that pride is an ugly thing. Pride and the boardwalk have separated Tom Gregory and Bettie Porter and the one is ugly and foolish and the other is beautiful and sensible."

"That's so," agreed the neighbor, "that's so."

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But to return to finances. When several hundred people partake of a supper that is donated, paying twenty-five cents a piece, when fifty or more, or, perhaps, a hundred or more, eat two or three of the donated suppers, when almost every family man carries off a sofa cushion or a bureau scarf, or a doll or even a rag rabbit, all donated articles, why, necessarily, money flows into the treasury.

The money, counted over and over again by the committee, was more than enough to liquidate the debt.

The girls were radiant.

"Sixteen dollars over and above expenses, hurrah!" cried Sue Rider. "We can buy lamps."

"Now," exclaimed the post-office clerk, in a congratulatory voice, "let the people dare to say that the Boardwalk Committee has accomplished nothing."

"No one will say it," declared Elizabeth Tarr.

"We have had many hardships," remarked Mary Harley, "many hardships and numerous tribulations, but what does anything matter since we have triumphed in the end."

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"My father," said Sue Rider, "was so genuinely pleased with the success of the political picnic that he didn't get very angry about the two dolls. Whew! didn't we have a noble assembly?"

"We ought to congratulate our president specially," said Katharine Dobson, "for, after all, she planned the whole thing. Why, Bettie Porter, what's the matter with you?"

Bettie Porter's brave head had fallen on Katharine's shoulder. The girl was sobbing nervously.

"She's worked too hard, that's it," said Mary Harley. "Do somebody run and bring her a glass of water."

Elizabeth Tarr ran and brought the water.

"I'm only tired," said Bettie, drying her tears and looking ashamed, "and I have an awful headache, and I've tried to do right, but I've done ever, ever so many foolish things."

"No wonder Bettie Porter has a headache," said Sue, as the four girls journeyed down the hill together, "Tom Gregory was at the picnic yesterday and he never spoke to her."

"Tom Gregory is a miserable fellow," declared Mary Harley, emphatically.

Bettie Porter was tired and headachy the following day, although it was certainly a day of rejoicing for the Boardwalk Committee of Primrose Hollow paid off its debt in all entirety. Not a few of the members were flauntingly triumphant.

About the purchase of the lamps, the president was dubious.

"We had better keep the sixteen dollars for the present," she said. "We had better wait until we are sure that Mr. Caulk isn't going to summon me before a magistrate. There might be a fine to meet."

"Bettie Porter," said Sue Rider, suddenly, "if you're summoned wear your white dress and red ribbons and, mark my words, the magistrate will be on your side."

"If you're summoned, Bettie," said the lawyer's daughter, "we four will be your witnesses. We have built a boardwalk and we certainly can answer any pertinent or impertinent questions put to us by a country magistrate."

The gossips of Primrose Hollow had ceased to

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talk of Stephen Caulk's delayed summons. Bettie Porter had made herself famous. Those petty and spiteful tales in reference to Peter Savage had died a natural death and they were buried. Bettie Porter had built a boardwalk for Primrose Hollow and had paid for it in hard cash. Beyond a doubt the girl had a head on her shoulders. She was a thorough business woman; the man who got her might thank his stars and heaven itself.

"Yes," said the gossips, male and female, "the widow's yard was a sight to see, the lanterns dangling everywhere. Candidates know a good thing when they come across it and they certainly did enjoy themselves at the picnic."

The other members of the committee had flourished about the fancy tables and everywhere else, and they were singing their own praises around the Hollow, but the Primrose people, generally, were well aware of the fact that Bettie Porter, and not the other four, had built the boardwalk and paid for it.

"And she had done it without the assistance of old man Caulk."

"Old man Caulk hadn't a finger in the pie."

“From the beginning she said she’d have none of him, and she had about as little of him as was ever heered tell of in the Hollow.”

“She soared high above old man Caulk’s threats and his bullying.”

Thus when the talk did turn to Stephen Caulk it was praiseworthy in so far as it concerned the widow’s daughter.

Old man Caulk, getting out of the range of the talk wherever he could, found himself wondering about himself and about the girl. If the magistrate had been well at the time of the threat, if the threat had been carried out, would matters have been different? Would there have been no boardwalk in Primrose Hollow, only a boardwalk fund resting in the Wainsborough bank side by side with the fund for the Union Church building? Would his interference have accomplished that and nothing more? Or wasn’t it possible that the girl, notwithstanding the trial, might have succeeded in building the boardwalk? It was very probable that Primrose Hollow would have a boom on account of the boardwalk; already traveling men preferred it to the little muddy town above; already he, Stephen Caulk,

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was bargaining for the possession of the old warehouse. The old warehouse with its stage and its faded trimmings and its rugged benches would soon be a something of the past and a new row of houses would front directly on the Hollow's new boardwalk.

There was a certain person belonging to the Primrose neighborhood who had not attended any of the entertainments or oyster suppers, but who, nevertheless, in her heart had wished joy and success to each and every venture. Miss Rachel Gregory, three days after the political picnic, spoke her thoughts openly to her nephew.

"Tom," she said, and she came close to the young man and touched him gently on the arm, "I wish you wouldn't let a little foolish thing harden your heart against happiness. You'll be sorry for it, Tom, if you do."

Miss Rachel's nephew interrupted with a laugh.

"For the life of me," said he, though his laugh had betrayed him, "I can't see what you are driving at, Aunt Rachel. Why in the world should I be hardening my heart?"

"She's a wonderful girl," said Miss Rachel.

The young man looked down.

His aunt, taking it for granted that Tom was waiting to hear more, spoke on, quietly, persistently, to the point. She was old enough to understand the world, she explained, and she was a Gregory and knew what it was to harden one's heart. A person had no right to recklessly throw away happiness. People allowed stubborn little things to grow and hurt them, whereas stubborn little things should be uprooted and cast aside.

Tom heard his aunt's voice, now and then, perhaps, he caught her words, but he was not listening. He was thinking of a letter that the wonderful girl had written to him, a letter from which a ring had dropped out upon the floor.

"You are making a great mistake, Aunt Rachel," he said, at last, and his voice was cold and proud, "a stupendous mistake. You think all this that's happened is my fault, but I can tell you Bettie Porter isn't blameless. A man ——" Tom paused and the red rushed into his face. He was thinking of that night of the entertainment. The foolish singer from the city had flourished on the stage in the old warehouse and he—he had sought foolish comfort in the pro-

vision store, that acknowledged disgrace to the quiet little town. He could not look into his aunt's face and call himself a man, yet he continued to declare to himself that the girl was not blameless.

"Tom," said Miss Rachel, "I want to tell you something."

Again the young fellow laughed, putting his hands to his ears.

"I haven't the time to listen, 'pon my soul I haven't, Aunt Rachel," he declared. "I've got to go and see to the work."

"You've been in the mountains two days, Tom," continued Miss Rachel. "You haven't heard the talk of the station. Tom, something has happened at the station."

"Isn't something always happening at the station?" asked Tom. "Has old Caulk agreed to fill in his strip of boardwalk? That will be the next wonderful thing that happens, if it hasn't happened already. Or has old Caulk grown spunky and set the warrant a-foot and has Miss Bettie Porter disappeared from off the face of the earth? Is that the latest Hollow news, Aunt Rachel? No, I am making a mistake," Tom

went on savagely, and with a blustering air, "I can see by your face that I am making a terrible mistake. The girl didn't run away. She appeared before the magistrate and gave tit-for-tat to old man Caulk. Well, I say 'Bravo!' too. I say she ought to be clapped and stamped; she ought to be encored a dozen times, Aunt Rachel. I am full of appreciation of the widow's daughter."

"Oh, Tom," said Miss Rachel, "you hurt me to the heart."

He had said that he must go out and see to the work, but he was in no hurry to depart.

"Let everything further that you have to say remain unsaid, Aunt Rachel," he said, and the hopeless sound of his voice hurt Miss Rachel afresh. "There are some things that must remain unaltered. You do not for a moment imagine that I have acted dishonorably? I am a Gregory too. It was not I who broke the engagement, you did not think that?"

He was looking at her steadily. "It was the widow's daughter who broke the engagement, Aunt Rachel."

The words, the widow's daughter, sounded

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hard and cruel. Miss Rachel threw her arms about the boy.

“Oh, Tom,” she said, tremulously, “you don’t know what you are saying ; you don’t know how awful it sounds to hear you talking like that. Bettie Porter is ill ; some people think she is dying. They say over at the Hollow that Bettie Porter has typhoid fever, Tom.”

CHAPTER XXVI

PEACE AND GOOD WILL

THE news of the illness of the widow's daughter spread quickly about Primrose. The political picnic had been a financial and social success. The boardwalk was paid for. Stephen Caulk had purchased the old warehouse. Undeniably the Hollow was going to have a boom. If the girl who had labored patiently through the various difficulties that beset her path had been "down sick," as the Primrose people put it, with brain fever, no man would have been surprised, though it is probable a number of them might have felt disturbed; but the widow's daughter was "down sick" with typhoid fever owing to the state of the water drawn up hourly through the stock of the old pump.

"It will be a tremendous pity if the widow's daughter is taken from us," said Dave Palmer, gazing solemnly into the private office of the station, "a most tremendous pity."

The station agent grunted. He was among

the men whose consciences might have pricked them if Bettie Porter had been down sick with brain fever. He grunted and felt sore and sorry.

"She's endowed with the brains of a man, is that young lady," declared Mr. Palmer, emphatically. "Primrose will miss her sadly."

"Miss Bettie was always one for peace and good-will," murmured the night operator.

"Old Holt has got another job," broke out the station agent, in the voice of a person bound to tell all he knows. "Mills was pleased with his bossing of the boardwalk and has hired him to boss the building of a barn. Holt's in clover."

"Many an individual has reason to be grateful to the widow's daughter," said Mr. Palmer. He laughed softly. "Every man, woman or child who ever passed along the Primrose roads has reason to be grateful to her; every man who has ever jumped into a Hollow mud-hole ought to sing her praises. The merchants have reason to be grateful to her for Primrose Hollow already is putting on the airs of a town. The traveling men have reason to be grateful to Miss Bettie and them that takes transient boarders and the

livery as well. Primrose Hollow has long waited for a boom but, let me tell you, gentlemen, the boom is upon us."

The widow's daughter remained ill during all the beautiful May days. Her mother's pale face frightened the neighbors.

"The widow might rest a spell if she'd allow people to see the girl and sit with her," said the Primrose women, "but she was always proud and stand-offish. If Bettie Porter dies she'll die alone with her mother, that's sure and certain."

Doctor Harley was waylaid and questioned, but he was wary and non-committal, emphasizing one point only, that typhoid fever is a treacherous disease, an exceedingly treacherous disease.

But the Primrose doctor was talkative in his appreciation of the Primrose boardwalk, so also was Mr. Selby. These two gentlemen asserted in the stores and the shops and the waiting-room that Bettie Porter had more ability in her little finger than existed in the brains of the rest of the Hollow folks. She, perhaps, drove a horse a little more rapidly than was good for a borrowed buggy—and Mr. Selby actually laughed as

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he said it—but when it came to the laying of a boardwalk the widow's daughter couldn't be beat. She was most assuredly a girl able to cry out "Never die!" and to stick to it.

When the warm June days arrived and Bettie grew no better, when Dr. Harley went around shaking his head though his answers were still non-committal, a gloom settled down upon the little town. The inhabitants of this little town had talked idle talk about the widow's daughter, they had listened eagerly to idle talk about her, but they had attended the entertainments. Katharine Dobson, behind the shelter of the post-office bars, felt her heart swelling at the solemn, quiet talk about her friend. These people in the little town had attended the entertainments in the old warehouse; they were glad of that.

The girl lying in the long, lean, unpainted house was a lover of peace and good-will, especially was she a lover of peace and good-will for Primrose Hollow. The other four members of the Boardwalk Committee, frightened at the thought of Bettie dying, were ringing their hands and crying out tearfully to all about them,

"The Hollow people ought to be friends ; for the sake of Bettie Porter, the Hollow people ought to be friends." If the widow's daughter had been dying of brain fever the little Hollow town could not have been more stirred up.

Mr. Weever met Mr. Rider on the boardwalk in front of the old warehouse. The two men looked at each other and stepped forward, each extending a hand.

"I declare," said Mr. Weever, in his hearty way, though his face was flaming, "I declare it isn't right for merchants of a town to live at enmity. We're both making a living."

"That's so," agreed Mr. Rider, "we're both making a very good living."

Then Mr. Weever asked a question that apparently had nothing to do with the subject. "You don't think she'll die?" he said.

"I sincerely trust not," answered Mr. Rider.

There was a certain man in Primrose Hollow who was hopefully waiting for the recovery of Bettie Porter. It seemed impossible to Stephen Caulk that the bright young life should be cut short, that the girl would never again walk the boardwalk of her own building, with her pretty

head in the air. He had listened to the conversations in the stores and the shops and more than once he had interrupted an uncomplimentary sentence pertaining to himself and he had begun to walk heavily when he approached a crowd.

“Yes,” said the men in the stores and the shops, “old man Caulk was coward enough to threaten the girl with the magistrate; but the widow’s daughter would have furnished good and sufficient reasons for turning down the old gentleman’s bid if the trial had been brought about. How in the name of common sense can Caulk stand the sight of them ties and them boards layin’ there ready for use, when as far as Harley or anybody else knows the widow’s daughter is dying! That there lumber is a sickening sight!” wound up the men in the stores and the shops.

In a little up-stairs room of the long, lean house, in a little white bed with the pillows all about her, Bettie Porter was looking down at a letter that her mother had opened. A five-dollar note rolled from the letter on to the bed-spread and the faint breeze from the window caused it to rattle and to turn over.

"Well?" questioned the widow.

"It's a donation to the boardwalk," answered Bettie.

Peter Savage had written the letter. In it he begged pardon for such misdemeanors as the steps and the extra charges. He sent the five dollar note with congratulations to Miss Bettie Porter, Boardwalk Committee, and hoped that she would forgive all errors forever and ever.

The obliging carpenter's letter was to the point. Its bluntness caused Bettie's cheeks to grow paler, if such a thing were possible.

"Mother," she said, after a little, "of course, I may never get well."

The widow was worn with nursing. She did not cry out, "You will get well; you must get well." Instead she went down on her knees beside the bed and hid her working face.

The girl put out a thin hand, caressingly. "Mother," she said, "I would like you to write me some letters. I have wanted them written for a long time."

No one will ever know except the widow what a difficult task was the writing of those letters.

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But she put the words down obediently, never once expostulating. In these letters Bettie begged pardon for her misdemeanors. She asked pardon of old man Caulk for losing her temper and for "some of the things" that she said. She begged the owner of the warehouse to forgive her for taking possession of the warehouse without leave or license, in a spirit of levity that she couldn't explain, being weak and incapable of steady thought on a subject. She apologized for breaking the buggy of the sewing machine agent and for every other offense of which she had been guilty in that eager business of building a boardwalk for Primrose Hollow. Then she turned a little on her pillow and said, staring straight at the ceiling, "Mother, I would like to see Tom before I die."

"Oh, Bettie!" sobbed the widow.

It did not take a long time for either letters or messages to reach their destination in and about Primrose. Five minutes after receiving his letter Mr. Stephen Caulk opened the gate, traversed the path and knocked at the door of the long, lean house.

The widow herself answered the knock. She

was surprised and a trifle flustered as she invited her guest to enter.

Old man Caulk returned thanks for the invitation but he did not accept it. Neither did he inquire after the health of Bettie Porter. Indeed, he understood that such a question might cause the widow to burst into tears, which certainly would do no good to any one. Old man Caulk was businesslike in all things, not addicted to the superfluous.

"I would like you to say to your daughter, madam," he said briskly, "that I shall be glad to have the boardwalk laid in front of those houses of mine. If she appoints a carpenter, I shall very gladly see that her orders are executed."

The Primrose people upon seeng Mr. Caulk's boardwalk being laid before the row of houses were perfectly certain that Bettie Porter was dying and they upbraided the widow for her cool stand-offishness and Doctor Harley for his non-committal answers.

"This will be the way of it," asserted the predominating voice in Mr. Weever's store, "some day we'll hear there is going to be a funeral and

that will be the end of it." It wasn't fair. Bettie Porter, Boardwalk Committee, was a public character. No, it wasn't fair. They wanted to take hold of her little white hand—how little it was they didn't dream—they wanted to congratulate her; they wanted to tell her to her face that they were glad they had lent their aid to her successful venture. Stephen Caulk had been to the door; the rest of them were clamorous to get into the long, lean house and into that little up-stairs room.

Every day for a long time Tom Gregory had gone to the door of the widow's house to inquire after the condition of the patient; every day he had waylaid the doctor and questioned him closely. The young fellow was in a state of the wildest anxiety and compunction. He deemed himself unworthy to so much as touch that capable little finger about which Primrose was raving. He had thought of Bettie's letter on that miserable day when his Aunt Rachel broke to him the latest news from the station, but he never since had thought of Bettie's letter; he had his own to think about. He told himself, in the vehement contrition that was upon him, that

Bettie Porter was too brave and too good to live but that if she died it would kill him.

A passing teamster saw Tom Gregory enter the long, lean house. The man went down the Hollow hill with his head turned about, staring open-mouthed.

It was well known in and about Primrose that Tom Gregory knocked every day at the widow's door; it was asserted that he was given short answers and turned away.

"Tom," said the people in the stores and the shops and the waiting-room, "he certainly is to be pitied. He brought it on himself, but that doesn't lighten the burden. No man living is sorrier than Tom is for not lending a helping hand to the boardwalk business."

"Tom done a foolish thing that night of the entertainment," added the people in the stores and the shops and the waiting-room, "but no man nor woman nor girl is regretting that either as much as Tom."

When the news was received that the widow had actually let Tom into the house, Primrose wondered vaguely previous to arriving at this solemn conclusion: The widow's daughter was

too much for peace and good-will to think of dying without forgiving Tom.

Tom Gregory was sorry for every one of his sins as he tipped softly up the stairs in the widow's wake, preparing all sorts of speeches, blaming himself in language intense and thrilling. But when he stood in the presence of the girl his speeches vanished. He would not have known her only for the eyes and the mouth. The pretty mouth smiled tremulously.

"Tom," said Bettie, and he had to stoop to hear the words, so softly were they spoken, "I couldn't give it up, you know ; it wouldn't have been right."

She was speaking of the boardwalk that had laid its shining length between them.

"No," said Tom, hoarsely, "of course, it wouldn't have been right."

That foolish episode of the ring made no difference. The girl was his to love and to cherish. Until when ? "Bettie, you must get well," cried Tom. He took possession of the pale little hands and, stooping, kissed them.

The look in her eyes hurt him ; the red that came into her face hurt him.

"Tom," she said again, "I had to do it; it was right to do it."

"Of course, it was right to do it," repeated Tom, reassuringly. Then he added, and the red was in his face, too, "Can't you believe me, Bettie? I am wonderfully proud of the girl who would not be turned aside from building a boardwalk for Primrose Hollow."

She gave a restful little sob and he kissed her hands again.

Dr. Harley's patient, in the satisfactory manner of an ordinary heroine of romance, began to improve immediately after Tom Gregory's visit and in a little while was able to receive visits from the Hollow and the Hollow's neighborhood.

During her convalescence Bettie realized that she was still destined to be a public character. She broke the news gently to Tom.

"For how long?" demanded Tom, who had about concluded that his aunts and Bettie could very well manage to live in harmony under the same roof.

"Until all of us together build a Union Church and a schoolhouse for Primrose Hollow." The widow's daughter was sitting in a great

chair on the porch of the long, lean house, and as she spoke her glance strayed out to the Hollow hill and down the road terminating in the abrupt turn at the dressmaker's, but in her mind's eye she beheld the whole of the Hollow and the site for the Union Church and the site for the school-house.

"Then," said Tom, "you will be ready to settle down into private life in the old farmhouse?"

"Yes," answered the girl, smiling softly, "and you may not believe me, Tom, but I'll be awfully glad."

